MILLENARIAN REBELS:
THE WRITINGS OF OS CANGACEIROS, VOLUME TWO

First Edition, First Printing
This translation is anti-copyright
@2008 Wolfi Landstreicher and Eberhardt Press.
Free for non-profit use.

Published & printed by
EBERHARDT PRESS
3527 NE 15TH #127
PORTLAND, OREGON 97212
503-288-4529

info@EberhardtPress.org
www.EberhardtPress.org

Originally published as
Profeti e fuorilegge Nel Sertão
by GRATIS in Italy.

MILLENARIAN REBELS

THE WRITINGS OF OS CANGACEIROS

VOLUME TWO

TRANSLATED BY WOLFI LANDSTREICHER

EBERHARDT PRESS

CONTENTS

Chronology 7

Translator's Introduction 9

Prophets and Outlaws of the Sertão 18

Appendix One: An Introduction to Millenarianism 106

Appendix Two: "No Age Like Unto This Age" 132

Chronology

1500 Pedro Alvares Cabral of Portugal discovers Brazil.

1530 Colonization advances towards the territory of the interior.

1550 The slave trade begins.

1716 The colony becomes a viceroyalty.

1817 Beginning of Sylvestre José dos Santos' messianic movement.

1822 Declaration of independence and proclamation of Empire.

1835 João Ferreira's messianic movement.

1871 Enactment of the law "of the free wind", a move toward the abolition of slavery. Pilgrimages of Antonio Conselheiro in the state of Bahia and of Father Cicero in the state of Ceara. Groups of *cangaceiros* multiply.

1888 Slavery is abolished throughout the Brazil.

1889 Proclamation of the Republic. Father Cicero performs his first miracles. Conselheiro preaches insurrection against the Republic.

1896-7 The Canudos campaign against Antonio Conselheiro. The *cangaceiro* Antonio Silvino begins to declare himself.

1913 Seditious movement of Father Cicero against the federal government.

1914 C*angaceiro* leader Antonio Silvino is arrested.

1920 Lampão joins Sinhô Pereira's *cangaço*.

1922 Lampião is proclaimed gang leader.

1926 Lampião's interview with Father Cicero.

1930 Getúlio Vargas' presidency.

1934 Father Cicero's death. Birth of Lourenço's messianic movement.

1937 Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship.

1938 Trap in Angico and death of Lampião. Lourenço's movement slaughtered.

1940 Corisco dies. With him, *cangaceirismo* disappears.

Translator's Introduction

It is no surprise that the French group of revolutionary outlaws, *Os Cangaceiros*, would take an interest in millenarian revolt, since their namesakes in Brazil fought side by side with millenarian rebels on more than one occasion. Such an interest is no mere whim. During the Middle Ages, revolt almost always expressed itself in millenarian language in the Western world, and such expressions continued, though less and less frequently, into modern times. Thus, those of us who are interested in understanding the ways in which the spirit of revolt develops in individuals and in larger groups of people could perhaps learn something from examining millenarianism in its various forms.

In *Prophets and Outlaws of the Sertão*[1], Georges Lapierre[2] tells the story of two movements of revolt in northeastern Brazil whose activities often intertwined. On the one hand, there were several millenarian movements involving dispossessed peasants, rural migrant workers, and

[1] *Sertao* refers to the backlands of Brazil.

[2] One of the individuals involved in the French group , *Os Cangaceiros*.

urban poor. On the other hand, there were the *cangaceiros*, individuals whose acts of revenge against a very visible ruling class and its lackeys had driven them to live as outlaws. They joined together in bands called *cangaços* to wage their battle against a social order to which they were neither willing to submit nor able to belong.

For me, the most interesting aspect of this historical tale lies in the comparisons and contrasts that can be made between these two very different forms of rebellion that manifested themselves in Brazil as the nineteenth century moved into the twentieth century.

Though Georges Lapierre's account mentions several millenarian movements in Brazil during that period, he only goes into any detail about two of them: the one that gathered around Antonio Conselheiro (Antonio the Counselor)[3] and

[3] Having found an English translation of the book that Georges Lapierre makes frequent reference to with regard to the movement around Conselheiro (*Os Sertoes* by Euclides da Cunha, translated as *Rebellion in the Backlands*), several other interesting facts come out. The movement was a tri-racial group, involving indigenous people, those of African descent, those of European descent and every possible mixture thereof. In addition, individuals from all parts of the underclasses were included: thieves and prostitutes mingled with former cowhands and "holy women". A significant part of the message that drew people to Canudos was a liberation from work, which was seen as worthless activity and detrimental to the spiritual needs of the moment. In addition, despite Conselheiro's own extreme asceticism and personal refusal of sexual intercourse, he not only turned a blind eye to what Cunha calls "free love", but even promoted it by saying that in these last days, there was no time to worry about such trivial matters as marriage vows.

the one that gathered around Father Cicero. In my opinion, the former is far more interesting, because it was truly a movement of millenarian revolt, whereas Father Cicero's movement, regardless of any apocalyptic or millenarian language it may have used, was essentially just a movement of social reform[4]. The very fact that its leader was able to maintain a position in the church hierarchy and gain a significant role in the state hierarchy shows that neither revolt nor the bringing of the millennium had any real

[4] On this level, I tend to see *cangaceiro* Lampião's relationship to Father Cicero as perhaps less respectful than Georges Lapierre portrays it. When Father Cicero gave Lampião a title, arms and ammunition in 1926, of course, Lampião gladly took them, but for his own purposes. Rather than doing what the good padre wanted, he simply went on his way, living his outlaw life, an indication to me that he recognized the limits of the priest's activities.

relevance to his activities. He was merely seeking to bring his concept of a christian social morality into the existing social order.

Conselheiro truly hated the existing social order and firmly believed that its end was at hand. Being a true believer, he was convinced that god was about to rain his wrath down upon the ruling order and bring a holy kingdom of real equality to the earth, one with neither state nor property, where the entire world would be equally accessible to all. Such a vision was bound to attract many of the dispossessed. Conselheiro's vision was apocalyptic, but also a vision of action. While the movement that gathered around him ended up forming a "holy city" (Canudos), a commune in which to begin the new way of living, it was also prepared to fight the ruling powers. That battle, however, took a form quite typical of a particular sort of millenarianism. It was a *defense* of the holy city that was based on trust in a supernatural intervention.

The *cangaceiros*, on the other hand, were not religious. They were simply outlaws, driven to leave society behind after taking revenge on someone from the ruling class or one of its lackeys. Like the millenarian rebels, they were from the poor, dispossessed classes. But the path they chose for their revolt was different,

reflecting a personal humiliation that pushed them to attack, rather than a more general humiliation. Lacking the faith of the millenarians, they built no utopian communal "cities", choosing rather to roam the countryside, attacking the rich and raiding cities. When their raids on cities were successful, they often expressed a type of utopian vision as well, throwing huge drunken feasts with music and dancing, often giving away some of what they had stolen. But they sought no permanence and faded back into the countryside to wander.

I find the sympathy of the *cangaceiros* for the millenarian movements of their time interesting because their way of life in their world seems to parallel that of the Free Spirit movement of the middle ages. The Free Spirits are often described as millenarians, but their millenarianism was distinctly different from that of Conselheiro, Thomas Münzer[5], the Münster millenarians and most other millenarian movements. The distinction lies in the fact that the Free Spirits did not see the millennium as something that was going to come soon, but as something that already existed within them. Their perspective was not apocalyptic — aiming

[5] Leader of a millenarian revolt in Germany during the early 1500s.

toward a future end of the world — but rather based in the immediate present. This is why the Free Spirits, while still using religious language, actually attacked the foundations of religion: dependence on an external supernatural power, hope in a heavenly future, faith in an external source of salvation. Quite rightly, the Free Spirits declared themselves to be greater than god, and apparently lived as vagabond outlaws… much like the *cangaceiros*. Their perspective left no room for passivity, because they had chosen to be the creators of their own lives.

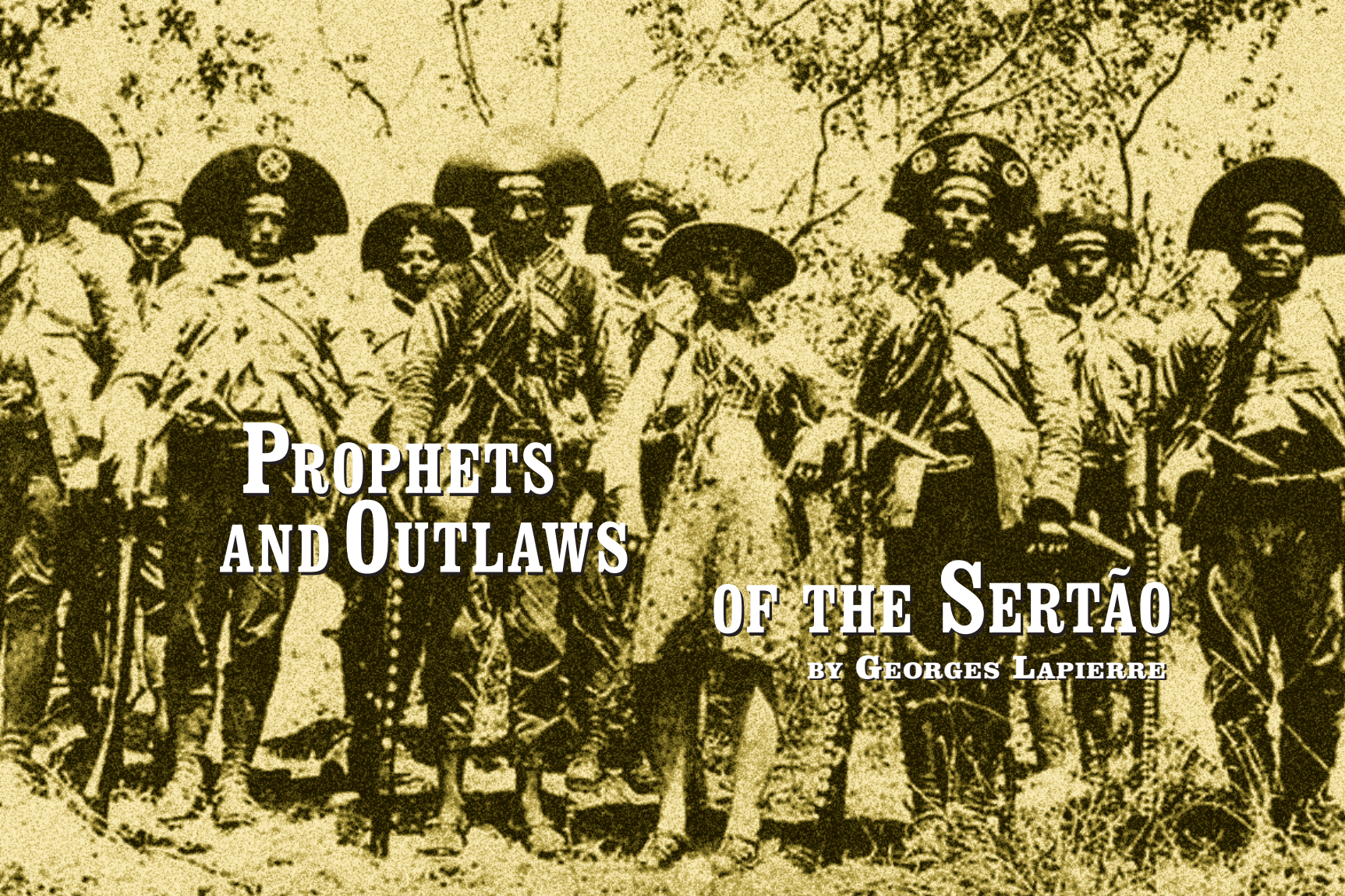
The millenarians of Canudos and Münster, and the followers of Thomas Münzer, certainly expressed a more active — and downright fierce — form of apocalyptism. They were ready to fight to the death for their *future* millenarian dream. But this willingness was based on the delusions of faith and hope — faith in a supernatural savior; hope in divine intervention. Thus, they are not so different from groups like the Branch Davidians in Texas — groups made up largely of the poor, waiting for the apocalypse and ready to defend themselves to the death if necessary. But the fact is that apocalyptism is far more often passive, precisely because it hopes in an external intervention. This is true whether or not it is religious in nature. We are currently living

in a period in which apocalyptic thinking is rampant even among people with no religious belief. Whether it takes the form of paralyzing fears of massive plagues and disasters or idealized dreams of a collapse that will sweep away the technological and bureaucratic horrors of the present, it doesn't ever seem to lead to active revolt. When people manage to get past their paralysis, such fears prod them to desperately grasp at any action the might "give us more time", and such desperation leads one to see any sort of anarchist revolutionary and utopian practice — especially one that is lived here and now — as a hindrance to this acceptance of any action that works, because such a practice rejects all litigation, all legislation, every form of working through the ruling order… And the apocalyptic hopes for a collapse have always tended to move people toward a mere survivalism, a "practice" that is nothing more than an accumulation of skills in the hopes of being the most fit to survive in the post-collapse world. In my opinion, a small and shabby vision.

Millenarian revolt is interesting mostly because when millenarian perspectives actually led to revolt, to one extent or another, those involved had begun to recognize that they themselves had to act to realize their own liberation. Its limits lie precisely in the continued

Cangaceiros.

reliance on a supernatural force to guarantee this. As long as this faith remained, millenarians tended to paint themselves into corners, creating small utopian settlements that they defended with courage and ferocity, but that ended up as their graveyards. But a few, like the Free Spirits, seem to have gotten beyond faith and hope, beyond dependence on a supernatural power to uphold them. And it is interesting that their practice becomes much more that of the outlaw who doesn't settle down, but remains on the move, the *cangaceiro*, who may perhaps develop a revolutionary perspective, and thus learn to aim all the more clearly.



Prophets and Outlaws of the Sertão

by Georges Lapierre

Today in the *sertão*, there are still a few ephemeral groups gathered around *beatos*[1], rapidly being dispersed by the police. There are also a few isolated bandits, mere brigands dedicated above all to theft. On the other hand, groups of hired killers called *capangas* continue to proliferate. They are in the service of the *fazendeiro*[2], who has taken great care to prevent any vague desire to rebel among his day laborers, mainly through pure and simple murder. This private militia receives support for its task from a police force and an army whose current means — helicopters, napalm, machine guns, radios, special troops — make any sort of social movement impossible. The security of the state is now assured in this vast arid region of northeast Brazil, which was once the place where messianic movements of great breadth developed together with the epic deeds of the *cangaceiros*[3].

And yet, there in the northeast, there are still people who remember the *cangaceiros*, Antonio Silvino, Sinhô, Lampião[4], who they imagine as

1 Blessed ones; the implication is that the *beato* is perceived as a living saint.

2 Wealthy owner of a *fazenda*, a cattle ranch.

3 Social bandits of northeast Brazil.

4 Virgulino "Lampião" Ferreira (1897-1938), whose nickname means "lamp" or "lantern".

champions of a lost world; people who preserve a sort of nostalgia for the time of Conselheiro — an era of happiness, abundance and freedom comparable to the legendary times of Charlemagne's empire and other enchanted realms. There are still those who pass down the legend of Father Cicero who is supposed to return to guide people to perfect happiness. Further south, in the *serrana* region, they pass down the legend of the "sleeping" friar João Maria, departing to find refuge on the enchanted mountaintop of Tayó. "From time to time, new emissaries of Brother João Maria come to announce his return; the last attempt happened in 1954. But the authorities keep watch and always manage to disperse the small gatherings of the faithful. But the memory of Brother João Maria does not seem to be close to burning out, and the places where he sojourned are venerated by his followers."[5]

Now law reigns in the *sertão*, but this wasn't always the case.

5 Pereira de Queiroz: *Réforme et Révolution dans les Société Traditionnelles.*

Antonio Conselheiro, "the Counselor".

"Let the faithful, then, abandon all their worldly possessions, anything that might defile them with the faintest trace of vanity. All fortunes stood on the brink of imminent catastrophe, and it was useless and foolhardy to endeavor to preserve them."[6]

— Euclydes da Cunha
Rebellion in the Backlands

Around 1870, the popularity of Antonio Conselheiro, otherwise called "the Counselor", would grow little by little in the villages of the interior, in the province of Bahia.

His true name was Antonio Vicente Mendes Maciel. He was originally from the state of Ceara, where a dark and bloody rivalry opposed his family to the Araujo family, the most powerful property owners of the region.

He appeared there announcing the end of the world, a cosmic catastrophe followed by the last judgment. He was sent by God and promised the faithful salvation and the delights of a Holy City in which peace and brotherhood would reign. It was Christ who prophesied his coming when "at the ninth hour, as he was resting on the Mount of Olives, one of his apostles saith

[6] Cunha, p. 135 (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1944).

unto him: Lord! what signs wilt thou give us for the end of this time? And he replied: many signs, in the Moon, in the Sun, and in the Stars. There shall appear an angel sent by my loving Father, preaching sermons at the gates, making towns in the desert, building churches and chapels, and giving his counsel."[7]

On mountains made of schist flakes sparkling with mica, on immense expanses covered with *caatinga*[8] — "it stretches out in front of him, for mile on mile, unchanging in its desolate aspect of leafless trees, of dried and twisted boughs, a turbulent maze of vegetation standing rigidly in space or spreading out sinuously along the ground, representing, as it would seem, the agonized struggles of a tortured writhing flora"[9] — on the plain on which nature has fun playing with the most abrupt contrasts, frighteningly sterile, marvelously blooming, the *sertão* had found its prophet.

Thin, austere, ascetic, dressed in a monk's robe and sandals, he went from village to village, distributing everything that was given to him to the poor. He was a *beato*. Very soon he

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 135, taken from notebooks found in Canudos.

[8] Scrub-forest land.

[9] Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

was called "Saint Anthony" or "Good Jesus." A rumor attributed miracles to him; he had saved a young girl bitten by a rattlesnake; mule drivers had spread the news. Little by little his prestige grew. When he came, everyone rushed to him to seek his counsel. He was accompanied in his peregrinations by a few faithful. Over the months, the group became more consistent.

With his followers, he repaired churches and built chapels. Wherever he passed, he preached forcefully against the outrages, extortions and injustices that infested the region, which was racked by political struggles transformed into vendettas, into senseless and bloody quarrels.

The Counselor's influence had become impressive. In his harangues he spoke an apocalyptic language full of Latin quotations, a cryptic and inspired language that gave the impression that his message came from the beyond: "The end was surely coming and the great judge of all."[10]

The prophet predicted strange things for the years to come, all announcing an imminent cosmic upheaval:

"In 1896, a thousand flocks shall run from the seacoast to the backlands; and then the backlands will turn into seacoast and the seacoast into backlands.

[10] Cunha, *op. cit.*, p.135.

"In 1897, there will be much pasturage and few trails, one shepherd and one flock only.

"In 1898, there will be many hats and few heads.

"In 1899, the water shall turn to blood, and the planet will appear in the east, with the sun's ray, the bough shall find itself on the earth, and the earth some place shall find itself in heaven.

"There shall be a great rain of stars, and that will be the end of the world. In 1900, the lights shall be put out. God says in the Gospel: I have a flock which is out of this sheepfold, and the flock must be united that there may be one shepherd and one flock only!"[11]

Only those who aided him and who followed him would be saved. He responded in this way to the deep aspirations of the poor to escape an underhanded fatality, a precarious and servile existence of oppression and desperation. His determination, his fieriness, his rage, his dynamic exhortations, had seduced them just as it had fascinated rebels, *quilombolas* (insurgent and escaped slaves living in hidden settlements called *quilombos*), unsubdued indians, all fugitives, mestizo or white, sought by village police.

[11] *Ibid.*, taken from notebooks found in Canudos.

Saint Sebastian had drawn his sword. When Conselheiro founded his first messianic community in 1873, in the area around Itapicurù in the province of Bahia, in many ways this recalled the *cangaço*[12] bands.

"There having arisen a misunderstanding between Antonio Conselheiro and his group, and the curate of Inhambupe, the former proceeded to draw up his forces as if for a pitched battle, and it is known that they were lying in wait for the curate, when he should go to a place known as Junco, in order that they might assassinate him. Those who pass that way are filled with fear at the sight of these miscreants equipped with clubs, daggers, hunting knives and blunderbusses; and woe to the one who is suspected of being hostile to Antonio Conselheiro."[13] (From a police report of the time)

The archbishop himself turned to the president of the province of Bahia, asking for reinforcements to contain "the individual Antonio Vicente Maciel, who by preaching subversive doctrines causes much harm to religion and to

[12] Literally a reference to the bundles of weapons carried by these outlaws, the term was also used to refer to their bands.

[13] Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

the state distracting people from carrying their obligations that they may follow him…".[14]

However, as the submissive university student Euclydes da Cunha wrote with a certain objectivity, but in the offensive jargon of his masters: "He drew the people of the backlands after him, not because he dominated them, but because their aberrations (sic!) dominated him."[15]

Of course, he announced Christ's thousand year kingdom on earth after the end of the world, but around him, under his stimulus, *jagunços*[16], rebels, and insurgents organized themselves, occupied land, shared labor and goods, and received gifts, not always voluntary.

The constituted order could not remain indifferent to the expansion of a community that gave so little consideration to the idea of property, that so proudly ignored the foundations of authority, religion and the state, as the apostolic archbishop said. Therefore, in 1889, the advent of the Republic, this democracy of property owners accelerated the conflict by

[14] *Ibid*,, p. 138.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 140.

[16] Literally, ruffian, but Cunha tended to use it to refer to all *sertanejos.* Apparently the people who followed Antonio Conselheiro to Canudos took the name upon themselves with pride.

making hostilities emerge. The millenarians considered the Republic precisely for what it meant: more state. It incarnated mortal sin, the power of selfishness, of cupidity, the supreme heresy that indicated the ephemeral triumph of the antichrist.

"There are unlucky beings
Who don't know how to do good
They degrade God's law
And represent the jackal's law

Protected by laws
You are so, people of nothing
We have God's law
You have the jackal's law"[17]

Conselheiro preached insurrection against the Republic and began to burn government decrees posted in the villages:

"In truth, I say unto you, when nation falls out with nation, Brazil with Brazil, England with England, Prussia with Prussia, then shall Dom Sabastião[18] with all his army arise from

[17] Poetry found in Canudos written on little bits of paper.

[18] D. Sebastião: King of Portugal (1557-1578), died in the course of an expedition against the Moors. The populace did not want to believe in his death. He became a legendary and messianic figure

the waves of the sea.

"From the beginning of the world a spell was laid upon him and his army, and restitution shall be made in war.

"And when the spell was laid upon him, then did he stick his sword in the rock, up to the hilt, saying: Farewell, world!

"For a thousand and many, for two thousand, thou shalt not come.

"And on that day, when he and his army shall arise, then shall he with the edge of the sword free all from the yoke of this Republic.

"The end of this war shall take place in the Holy House of Rome, and the blood shalt flow even in the great assembly."[19]

As the university student Euclydes da Cunha remarked with a valet's conceit: "your *jagunço* is quite as inapt at understanding the republican form of government as he is the constitutional monarchy. Both to him are abstractions, beyond the reach of his intelligence. He is instinctively opposed to both of them… there was very little political significance to be found… such as might have lent itself to the messianic tendencies revealed. If the rebel attacked the established order, it was because he believed that the promised kingdom of bliss was near at hand."[20]

Up to this point, the order established by monarchists or republicans had never led to the reign of delights for the poor, quite the contrary. Rather, with the Republic came a clear-cut worsening of the fate reserved to those who did not possess anything. What Conselheiro and his followers fought against was the progressive arrangement of a new order. They did not rebel in the name of an old order, but for the idea they had of a human society. Their eye was not turned toward the past, but toward the future. They were carriers of a social project. Rising up against the constituted order, or the one that was beginning to be constituted, they rose up against the essence of a world that created private property, forced labor, the wage worker, police, money; they rose up against a

comparable to that of the Emperor of the last days: he would be returned from the isle of Mists, having organized an army to free Jerusalem. We find this Portuguese legend from the end of the sixteenth century to again be quite popular in Brazil. It formed the nucleus of two important messianic movements that manifested in the province of Pernambuco in 1817 an 1835: that of Sylvestre José dos Santo and that of Joaõ Ferreira.

[19] Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 162.

social practice and its essence. For them, the future was not a return to the past, but rather the end of a world, an overturning of society from top to bottom, *a revolution* for which the humanity that was there from the start finally returns as realized humanity.

The autonomy of the villages having been decreed, the local councils of the interior of Bahia had tacked up edicts meant to raise taxes on notice boards, traditional bulletin boards that took the place of the press.

When the news spread, Conselheiro was at Bom Conselho. The taxes enraged him, and he immediately organized a protest. On market day, the population assembled and set fire to the notice boards amid seditious shouts and firecracker explosions. After this *auto-da-fé* that the authorities could not prevent, he raised his voice and, wise and cool-headed as always, openly incited rebellion against the laws. Aware of the danger that threatened him and his own, he left the city and headed north on the road of Monte-Santo, toward a remote, abandoned region surrounded by steep mountains and insurmountable *caatinga*, a temporary refuge for bandits.

The events had a certain echo in the capital, from which a police force departed to stop the rebels, who were fewer than two hundred

people at the time. The squad tracked the rebels to Massète, a bare, sterile place between Tucano and Cumbe. The thirty well-armed police attacked them violently, certain they'd be victorious in the first assault. But they were facing bold *jagunços*. The police were beaten and had to hastily retreat on foot. The commander was the first to give the fine example.

After accomplishing this endeavor, the millenarians were back on the road, accompanying the prophet's Hegira. No longer looking for populous places, they headed toward the desert. Passing through mountain chains, bare plateaus and sterile plains, they reached Canudos.

It was an old *fazenda*, a temporary holding situated on the Vasa-Barris river. By 1890, it was abandoned and was used as a resting place. It included about fifty huts made of clay, rock and straw.

In 1893, when the apostle arrived, Canudos was in total decay. Everywhere there were abandoned shelters and empty cabins. And at the summit of the spur of Mount Favella, the old residence of the owner was sighted, without a roof, and its walls reduced to ruins.

The community occupied the wastelands, rapidly making them bear fruit. The village developed swiftly as disciples coming from the most widespread places settled there to live. In

the eyes of the inhabitants, it was a sacred place, surrounded by mountains, untarnished by the operations of government. Canudos came to know dizzying growth. Here is what one witness said: "Certain places in this district and others round about, as far away even as the state of Sergipe, became depopulated, so great was the influx of families to Canudos, the site selected by Antonio Conselheiro as the center of his operations. As a result, there was seen offered for sale at the fairs an extraordinary number of horses, cattle, goats, etc., as well as other things such as plots of ground, houses and the like, all to be had for next to nothing, the one burning desire being to sell and lay hold of a little money, and then go share it with the Counselor."[21]

The land completely covered the hills. The absence of streets and plazas, apart from that of the church, and the great mass of hovels, made a single dwelling place out of it. The village was invisible at a certain distance and, surrounded by the windings of the Vasa-Barris river, vanished into the terrain.

From close up, one would have seen an extraordinary labyrinth of narrow passages that poorly divided the chaotic heap of huts from the clay roof.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

Canudos.

The dwellings made of straw and stone were composed of three tiny parts: a small waiting room, a room used as a kitchen and dining room, and a side alcove hidden by a low, narrow door. There was some furniture: a bench, two or three small stools, cedar chests, hammocks. And there were a few accessories: the *bogo* or *borrocha*, a leather bag for carrying water, and the *aió,* a bag for carrying game made from *carúa*[22] fibers. On the floor of the main room lay a coarse prayer rug. Finally, there were

[22] A small palm.

old weapons: the large *jacare*[23] knife with a broad sturdy blade, the *parna-hyba* knife of the lookout with a blade as long as a sword, the three-meter goad with its iron point, the hollow club filled with lead, bows, guns — the musket of thin reed loaded with gravel, the larger musket loaded with buckshot, the heavy harquebus capable of shooting stones and horns, the blunderbuss flared like a bell.

Everything was here; the inhabitants of Canudos had no need for anything else.

"The wandering *jagunços* were here pitching their tents for the last time, on that miraculous heaven-bound pilgrimage of theirs."[24]

Each cabin was both a home and a fortified nook. Canudos was to become the Münster of the *sertão,* its inhabitants "terrible baptists capable of loading deadly daffodils with rosary beads."

Canudos generously opened its pantries, filled with gifts and the fruit of common labor, to those in need. Social activity was not directed by anyone; it was self-organized. Only brandy had been prohibited by common agreement. Some were busy with cultivation or tended the flocks

[23] *Jacare* literally means alligator, a reference to the strength of this knife.

[24] Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

of goats, while others kept watch over the surrounding areas. Groups were formed to travel far, carrying out expeditions. But all the activity seemed to converge toward the construction of a new church; this was the common work around which the endeavors were organized. This society, which camped in the desert, was devoted to a sacred mission, considering itself a community, a society that was religious in its essence and that gave body to its spirit by building its church stone by stone. The new church was erected at the tip of the plaza in front of the old one. Its greater, massive walls recalled the great walls of fortresses. The rectangular body would have been transfigured by two very high towers, with the audacity of a rough Gothic structure. "The truth is, this admirable temple of the *jagunços* was possessed of that silent architectural eloquence of which Bossuet speaks."[25]

Much livestock arrived from Geremoabo, Bom Conselho and Simao Dias. Bands went out from Canudos, going to attack the surrounding territories and sometimes conquering cities. In Bom Conselho, one of these bands took possession of the town, placed it in a state

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

of siege and sent the authorities away, starting with the justice of the peace. Such warlike expeditions alarmed the constituted powers.

The provincial government, and then the federal government, denounced the holy city. It gave an example that was a threat to the state, so much the more so as its notoriety grew. There was a risk that the experiment would spread. It became urgent to wipe Canudos off the map, to make it disappear in fire and blood, to extirpate it.

Four increasingly impotent expeditions were undertaken against Canudos between 1896 and 1897.

"The *cangaceiros* would make incursions to the south, the *jagunços* would make forays to the north, and they would confront each other without uniting forces, being separated by the steep barrier of Paulo Affanso. It was the insurrection in the Monte Santo district which united them; and the Canudos Campaign served to bring together, spontaneously, all these aberrant forces which were hidden away in the backlands."[26]

Infamous bandits revealed themselves to be formidable strategists. The inhabitants of Canudos made the Republic's armies waver.

In October 1896, the first magistrate of Joazeiro telegraphed the governor of Bahia,

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

soliciting his intervention with the aim of taking measures to protect the population, so he said, from an attack by the *jagunços* of Antonio Conselheiro.

On November 4, the governor sent an armed force of one hundred soldiers and a doctor under the command of Lieutenant Manuel da Silva Pires Ferreira. On November 19, they reached Uaúa, a small village on the Vasa-Barris river between Joazeiro and Canudos. At dawn two days later, the *jagunços* brutally attacked them, practically fighting with cold steel against soldiers armed with modern repeating rifles. The rebels lost one hundred and fifty men. The troops counted ten dead and sixteen wounded. The doctor went mad. The troops arranged to retreat to Joazeiro.

On November 25, an armed force (five hundred forty-three soldiers, fourteen officers, three doctors) with four Krupp cannon and two machine guns, under the command of Commander Frebonio de Brito, left Bahia at the time of the *Queimadas*. It reached Monte Santo on December 29. On January 12, 1897, it left for Canudos, taking the *Cambaio* path. On January 18 and 19, the first battles took place in sight of Canudos as the army crossed the gorge. The *jagunços* attacked suddenly, disappearing to reappear a bit further away, little blunderbusses

against repeating rifles and machine guns. They left many dead on the ground, but inflicted such a harsh and unexpected defeat on the army that it had to beat a hasty retreat to Monte Santo.

When the government became aware of the disaster that happened during the crossing of the Cambaio, it understood the seriousness of the war in the *sertoes*, all the more so because the fame of Canudos spread throughout the *sertão* as a consequence of this enterprise.

On February 13, 1897, Colonel Moreira César, well-known throughout the nation, commanded the first regular expedition that embarked from Rio heading for Bahia. On the eighth day, the expedition reached Queimadas with thirteen hundred men and all the necessary equipment. At Monte Santo, they skirted the mountain from the east to arrive at Angico and on the peak of Favella the afternoon of March 2.

Sure of his task, Moreira César launched an assault against the village after a brief bombardment. It was a catastrophe for him and his men. Like a trap, like an immense spider web, like a fish net, the village closed around the army. Every path, every dead end, every turn, every house hid determined people armed with large knives, pikes and blunderbusses. The army

was quickly caught in a tragic hand-to-hand battle. It was a disaster that quickly turned into a panic. The famous Colonel César was fatally wounded. Colonel Tamarindo, who replaced him, was also killed.

"In the meanwhile, the *sertanejos* were gathering up the spoils. Along the road and in nearby spots weapons and munitions lie strewn, together with pieces of uniforms, military capes and crimson striped trousers, which, standing out against the grey of the *caatingas,* would have made their wearers too conspicuous as they fled. From which it may be seen that the major portion of the troops not only had thrown away their weapons but had stripped themselves of their clothing as well.

"Thus it was that, midway between 'Rosario' and Canudos, the *jagunços* came to assemble a helter-skelter open-air arsenal; they now had enough and more than enough in the way of arms to satisfy their needs. The Moreira César expedition appeared to have achieved this one objective: that of supplying the enemy with all this equipment, making him a present of all these modern weapons and munitions.

"The *jagunços* took the four Krupps back to the settlement, their front-line fighters now equipped with formidable Mannlichers and

Comblains[27] in place of the ancient, slow-loading muskets. As for the uniforms, belts and military bonnets, anything that had touched the bodies of the cursed soldiery, they would have defiled the epidermis of these consecrated warriors, and so the latter disposed of them in a manner that was both cruel and gruesome…

"…the *jagunços* then collected all the corpses that were lying here and there, decapitated them, and burned the bodies; after which they lined the heads up along both sides of the highway, at regular intervals, with the faces turned toward the road, as if keeping guard. Above these, from the tallest shrubbery, they suspended the remains of the uniforms and equipment, the trousers and multicolored dolmans, the saddles, belts, red-striped kepis, the capes, blankets, canteens, and knapsacks.

"The barren, withered *caatinga* now blossomed forth with an extravagant-colored flora: the bright red of officers' stripes, the pale blue of dolmans, set off by the brilliant gleam of shoulder straps and swaying stirrups.

"There is one painful detail that must be added to complete this cruel picture: at one side of the road, impaled on a dried *angico*[28] bough,

[27] Types of repeating rifles.

[28] A gum-bearing tree.

loomed the body of Colonel Tamarindo.

"It was a horrible sight. Like a terribly macabre manikin, the drooping corpse, arms and legs swaying in the wind as it hung from the flexible, bending branch, in these desert regions took on the appearance of some demoniac vision. It remained there for a long time.

"And when, three months later, a fresh expeditionary force set out for Canudos, this was the scene that greeted their eyes: rows of skulls bleaching along the roadside, with the shreds of one-time uniforms stuck up on the tree branches round about, while over at one side — mute protagonist of a formidable drama — was the dangling specter of the old colonel."[29]

While in the *sertão* the epic deeds of Canudos were sung in poems where the undertakings became legendary, in the capital the government was not able to figure it out. Canudos was an impoverished village, not even on the map, and yet it had managed to put entire regiments in check. The state resorted to inventing tales of political conspiracies, but began to seriously worry. It feared that little known *sertão,* from which men armed for revenge emerged from every province, converging on Canudos to join the fight. The university student Euclydes da

[29] Cunha, *op.cit., pp. 274-276.*

Cunha wrote about this: "the *jagunço*… could do only what he did do — that is, combat and combat in a terrible fashion, the nation which, having cast him off for three centuries almost, suddenly sought to raise him to our own state of enlightenment at the point of the bayonet, revealing to him the brilliancy of our civilization in the blinding flash of cannons."[30]

The resolute men of the *sertão* had found the place for their struggle: a village of huts with the appearance of a citadel. The state faced the mute and tenacious hostility of those who knew quite well what the nation demanded of them: submission and resignation. Being neither submissive nor resigned, they would not allow themselves to be dominated.

In social war, the principle of war that postulates the annihilation of the enemy knows its most complete application — its conclusion, if you will. What is at stake in wars between nations is complex. It is essentially political, as is the stake in wars of national liberation. It doesn't necessarily require the annihilation of the enemy. Rather it aims to impose a political will on one's adversary and to thus create through the tools of war the conditions

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

for negotiating with him. In this case, war is the continuation of politics by other means, as Carl von Klauswitz noted. In the other case, it demands the total and definitive destruction of the enemy. What is at stake is social: the suppression or the maintenance of servitude. There is no middle course.

For the insurgent, it is a matter of putting an end to his slavery, and there is no compromise possible on such an essential matter. For the master, it is a matter of safeguarding his social position, his privileges, his status. No consideration external to the war itself is thus able to impede and moderate its violence. It is war in its pure, original state; it is what it originally was, pure negativity.

In a dangerous situation like social war, errors due to hesitation, vacillation and kind-heartedness are precisely the worst of things. Every consideration external to the purpose of the war, the total defeat of the enemy, would be fatal.

Since the use of physical force in one's interests does not, in fact, exclude the cooperation of intelligence, those who ruthlessly avail themselves of this force without backing away in the face of any bloodshed, any moral restriction, will have an advantage over their enemy, if the latter does not act on the same basis.

Violence, or rather physical violence (since

moral violence does not exist outside of the concept of the State and Law, whose violence is that of the victor that imposes its will) thus forms the *means*. The *end* is overthrowing the enemy.

Social war is absolute brutality that does not tolerate weakness. Ignoring this element because of the repugnance it inspires would be a waste of energy, not to mention a mistake. Showing indecision at a certain point in relation to the predetermined aim means leaving the initiative to the enemy, a mistake for which one will pay quite dearly.

There can be no negotiation. Peace is either the return to slavery or the end of slavery. Whichever it is, it is the destruction of one of two possibilities.

On April 5, 1897, General Arthur Oscar organized the forces for the fourth expedition: six brigades in two columns. Battalions were conscripted from throughout the land, for national unity, the sacred union against the internal enemy.

The two columns were supposed to converge on Canudos. The one commanded by Arthur Oscar would go by the Monte-Santo road, while the other, under the command of Savaget, would pass through Geremoabo, coming

together to launch the attack at the end of June. But as they neared Canudos, both encountered some difficulties. Savaget's column was attacked twice between Cocorobó and Canudos. Losses were heavy, and the general was wounded. "As always, the *sertanejos* were taking the edge off victory by unaccountably rising up again from the havoc of a lost battle. Beaten, they did not permit themselves to be dislodged. Dislodged at all points, they found shelter elsewhere, at once conquered and menacing, fleeing and slaying as they fled in the manner of the Parthians[31]."[32]

Things got even more serious for General Arthur Oscar, who had reached the peak of Favella that overlooked the village. After a rapid victory to conquer the position, he found himself a prisoner, besieged by those he had just beaten. He had to request aid from the Savaget column. On July 1, the *jagunços* attacked the encampments, and some tried to reach the "Killer", the siege cannon (a Witworth 32) that bombed Canudos. They didn't manage to do this.

---

[31] *Translator's Note*: This is a reference to the ancient Parthians who would continue shooting arrows at their enemies even as they retreated from a lost battle. This is the source of the English term "parting shot", originally "Parthian shot".

[32] Cunha, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

The army found itself in a critical situation. Cut off from its supplies, it could neither advance nor retreat. "At the same time the rifle fire all around made it plain to all that this was in truth a siege to which they were being subjected, even though the enemies' lines in the form of numerous trenches were spread out laxly, in an undefined radius, over the slopes of the hill… The bold and unvarying tactics of the *jagunços* were nowhere more clearly revealed than in the resistance which he offered even while retreating, as he sought every means of shelter which the terrain afforded… On the one hand were men equipped for war by all the resources of modern industry, materially strong and brutal, as from the mouths of their cannons they hurled tons of steel on the rebels; and on the other hand, were these rude warriors who opposed to all this the masterly stratagems of the backwoodsman. The latter willingly gave their antagonists his meaningless victories, which served merely as a lure; but even as the 'victor', after having paved with lead the soil of the *caatingas*, was unfurling his banners and awakening the desert echoes with his drumbeats, they, not possessing these refinements of civilization, kept time to triumphal hymns with the whines of bullets from their shotguns."[33]

Two weeks later, supplies finally arrived, and the troops launched an attack on the village. They were defeated with considerable losses. In the army and the government, there was dismay.

A new brigade, the Girard brigade, was hastily formed in Queimadas, consisting of one thousand forty-two soldiers and sixty-eight officers. It set off on August 3 to supply Arthur Oscar's army with men and provisions. On August 15 it was attacked and lost ninety-one blockheads, for which it earned the mocking epithet, the nice brigade.

The government now understood that it was no longer a question of making an assault against a village, but of organizing a genuine military campaign of several weeks, if not several months, with the aim of completely surrounding it. It understood that the war would be long and hard, and that it needed to supply itself with the necessary tools.

Marshall Bittencourt was put in charge of the campaign. Two supplementary brigades arrived from Bahia and formed a division. A regular convoy service for Monte-Santo was organized. The army no longer risked being cut off from its

[33] *Ibid*., p 235-236.

rear and could thus be installed in a trench war. The long strangulation of Canudos had begun.

On September 7, Calumby road was opened, allowing the siege to come together.

On September 22, Antonio Conselheiro died.

The fighting resumed more fiercely around Canudos. The inhabitants discovered the spirit of initiative. With an astonishing outflanking maneuver, the skirmishes reached all the enemy's positions, striking the entire front line, trench by trench. At a single stroke, they unexpectedly got past every point of the front. They were beaten and driven back. Then they launched themselves against the nearest trenches. Again beaten and pushed back, they directed themselves against those who followed and went on this way. Though unsuccessful, their assaults were unremitting, forming an immense ring-around-the-rosy dance before the troops.

"Those who, only the day before, had looked with disdain upon this adversary burrowing in his mud huts, were now filled with astonishment, and as in the evil days of old, but still more intensely now, they felt the sudden strangling grip of fear. No more displays of foolhardy courage. An order was issued that the bugles should no longer be sounded, the only feasible call to arms being that which the foe himself so

eloquently gave….

"In short, the situation had suddenly become unnatural….

"The battle was feverishly approaching a decisive climax, one that was to put an end to the conflict. Yet this stupendous show of resistance on the part of the enemy made cowards of the victors."[34]

The troops tried to reinforce the encirclement, penetrating step by step into the interior of the village, but fierce resistance thwarted their advance. The *jagunços* fell back, but did not flee. They remained nearby, a few steps away, in the next room of the same house, separated from their enemies by a few centimeters of pressed earth. There wasn't much space in the village, so those who wanted to preserve themselves and put up an increasing resistance to the soldiers gathered in the hovels to crowd them. Though they gave up on some things, they reserved quite different surprises for the victors. The cunning of the *sertanejo* made itself felt. Even in their most tragic moment, they would never accept defeat. Resisting to the death was not enough — they would challenge the enemy by taking the offensive.

On the night of September 26, the *jagunços*

[34] *Ibid*., p. 436-437.

violently attacked four times. On September 27, eighteen times. The next day, they didn't respond to morning and afternoon bombings, but attacked from six o'clock in the evening until five the next morning.

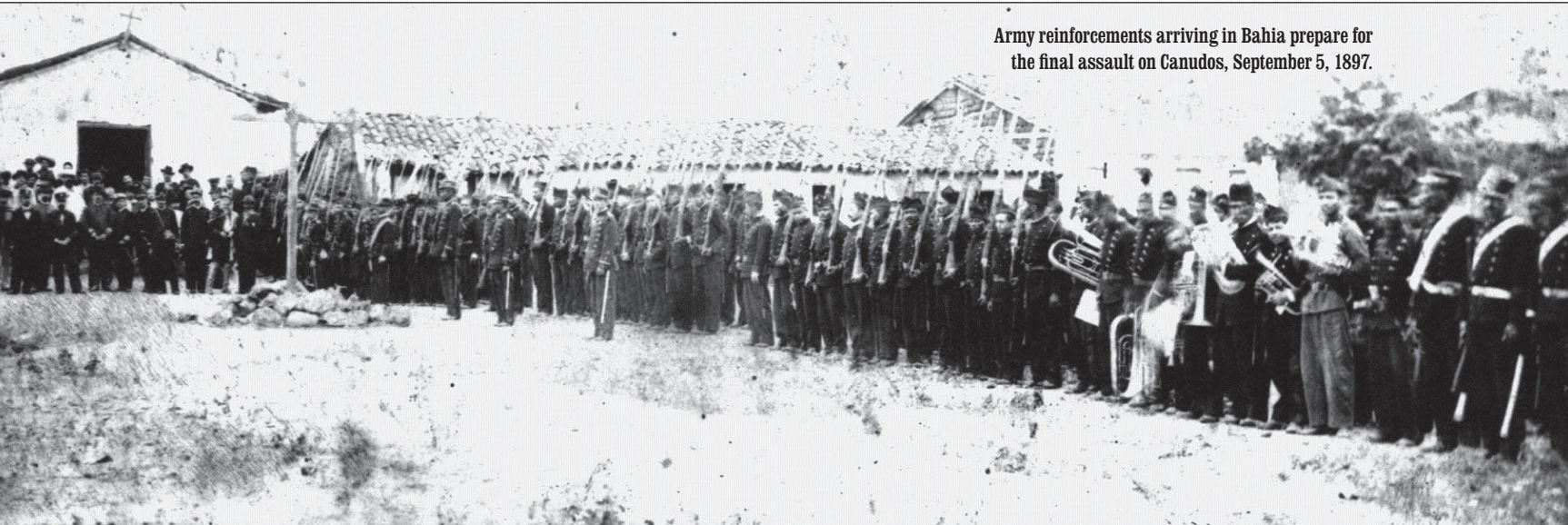
On October 1, 1897, an intensive bombing of the last hotbed of resistance began. A decisively cleaned-up terrain was needed for the assault. It had to happen at a single strike, at a charge, with only one concern, the ruins.

No projectile was spared. The last bit of Canudos was inexorably turned inside out, house by house, from one end to the other. Everything was completely devastated by the artillery barrage. The last *jagunços* suffered the ceaseless bombardment in all its destructive violence.

But no one was seen fleeing; there wasn't the least agitation.

And when the final strike was shot, the inexplicable quiet of the destroyed countryside could have made one think that it was deserted, as if the population had miraculously escaped during the night.

The attack began. The battalions moved in from three points to converge at the new church. They didn't get far. The *jagunços* followed their



Army reinforcements arriving in Bahia prepare for the final assault on Canudos, September 5, 1897.

attackers step by step and suddenly came back to life in a surprising and victorious way like always.

All the pre-established tactical movements were thrown into disarray. Instead of converging on the church, the brigades were stopped, fragmented and dispersed among the ruins. The *sertanejos* remained invisible. Not a single one appeared or tried to pass through the plaza.

This failure resembled a rout, since the attackers were stopped by unexpected resistance. They took shelter in the trenches and finally escaped the fix by limiting themselves to a merely defensive strategy. Then the *jagunços* emerged from the smoking huts and swooped down on the soldiers.

There was an urgent need to expand the original attack. Ninety dynamite bombs were launched against those who remained in Canudos. The vibrations produced fissures that crisscrossed over the ground like seismic waves. Walls collapsed. Many roofs fell to pieces. The thick accumulation of black powder made the air unbreathable. It seemed as though everything had vanished. It was the complete dismantling of what was left of the "sacred city."

The battalions waited for the cyclone of flames to die down before launching the final attack.

But it was not to be. On the contrary, a sudden

withdrawal took place. No one knows how, but from the flaming ruins, gunfire poured out, and the soldiers ran for shelter on all sides, mostly withdrawing back behind their trenches.

Without trying to hide, jumping over fires and those roofs that remained standing, the last defenders of Canudos leapt out. They launched an assault of wild audacity, going to kill the enemy in their trenches. These enemies felt their lack. Their courage failed. Unity of command and unity of action dissolved. Their losses were now heavy.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon, the soldiers fell back in defense, tasting defeat.

But the *sertanejos*' situation had deteriorated, since they were blockaded in such a confined space.

Nonetheless, on October 2, the weary "victors" saw the dawn emerging under a challenging salvo of gunfire.

Throughout the day, three hundred people took advantage of the truce and asked to surrender. But much to the chagrin of the military authorities, they were just exhausted women, very young or wounded children, and sick old people — all those who could no longer hold a weapon. They were slaughtered the following night. ("And words being what they are, what comment should we make on the fact that, from the morning of

the third on, nothing more was to be seen of the able-bodied prisoners who had been rounded up the day before…"[35]) The military did not really take the wounded *jaguncos* prisoner. All who fell into the soldiers' clutches were finished off later with cold steel.

"There is no need of relating what happened on October 3 and 4. From day to day the struggle had been losing its military character, and it ended by degenerating completely.… One thing only they knew, and that was that the *jagunços* would not be able to hold out for many hours. Some soldiers had gone up to the edge of the enemy's last stronghold and there had taken in the situation at a glance. It was incredible. In a quadrangle trench of a little more than a yard in depth, alongside the new church, a score of fighting men, weak from hunger and frightful to behold, were preparing themselves for a dreadful form of suicide… a dozen dying men, their fingers clenched on the trigger for one last time, were destined to fight an army.

"And fight they did, with the advantage relatively on their side still. At least they succeeded in halting their adversaries. Any of the latter who came too near remained there to help fill that sinister trench with bloody mangled bodies…

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 475.

"Let us bring this book to a close.

"Canudos did not surrender. The only case of its kind in history, it held out to the last man. Conquered inch by inch, in the literal meaning of the words, it fell on October 5, toward dusk — when its last defenders fell, dying, every man of them. There were only four of them left: an old man, two other full-grown men, and a child, facing a furiously raging army of five thousand soldiers…

"The settlement fell on the fifth. On the sixth they completed the work of destroying and dismantling the houses — 5,200 of them by careful count."[36]

Once again the law of the Republic ruled over the *sertão*. Thus, the heroic epic of Canudos came to an end, an adventure full of humanity that perished in sound and fury. Canudos, the empire of Belo Monte, was not defeated; it vanished together with the last one killed. It was annihilated.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 475. Euclydes da Cunha's book ends with a slander typical of the time: "… they took [Antonio Conselheiro's head] to the seaboard, where it was greeted by delirious multitudes with carnival joy. Let science here have the last word. Standing out in bold relief from all the significant circumvolutions were the essential outlines of crime and madness." (p. 476)

In those days, in the province of Ceara, a vast, religiously inspired social reform movement developed under the guidance of Father Cicero. This movement experienced a less tragic end, because Father Cicero knew how to navigate his way with authority among the political components of the region, with full respect for the state and property, a compromise before power that assured him not only impunity, but a position recognized and respected by all.

This movement was of a more priestly rather than blatantly messianic inspiration. The spirit of Catholicism in both its political and social sense animated the movement more than the spirit of millenarianism, which is purely social and has nothing to do with politics. It intended to rediscover the pattern of the primitive Church: devoting political means to a social mission.

Padre Cicero had exceptional prestige. He was the only Brazilian messiah to belong to the clergy. All the others were lay people who were carried into divine service by vocation, but who never took holy orders. He was sent into the hamlet of Joazeiro in 1870, in the early days

of his ministry, and traveled throughout the region preaching. After this period of Franciscan poverty, he started to animate social activity around Joazeiro with an ideal of peace according to which the interests of all were supposed to prevail over particular interests, the source of quarrels and conflicts. He had managed to convince small property owners and peasants to stop living on their land and instead move to the village, near to him. In the morning they went to work in the fields, and in the evening they came back.

A traffic of pilgrims began in Joazeiro. They came to ask the blessing and counsel of Padre Cicero.

In 1889, when the Republic was proclaimed, Padre Cicero reacted in his way by carrying out his first miracles, which consolidated his position and prestige. The republican state didn't dare to provoke hostilities and tolerated this movement that criticized the bourgeois spirit without criticizing the state. Pilgrims became increasingly numerous. Many settled in the holy city of Joazeiro where they found protection with the "little father". The Church was disturbed by this and tried to put an end to the turbulence, which it considered dangerous. It ordered Padre Cicero not to say mass or preach anymore, but it could not force him to leave

Joazeiro. It was afraid that his followers would mobilize to defend him, something that must be avoided at all costs.

Padre Cicero had allies among local political leaders. His prestige, his influence, and the progressive electoral force at his disposal pushed him to strengthen his growing political authority by getting elected as municipal prefect.

In 1914, a victory by his enemies made relations with the provincial government difficult. The "little father" then called his followers to holy war against the provincial government, which represented the Antichrist. God wanted it to be overthrown so that perfect happiness without shadow could reign on earth. These incitements to struggle caused troops to be sent against the New Jerusalem. But unlike Conselheiro, Father Cicero enjoyed important political support in the capital of Brazil; and besides, this insurrection was limited to political goals and didn't have the ambition of overthrowing the constituted order. The prophet's followers, with federal complicity, triumphed over the forces deployed against them and placed the provincial capital under siege, putting the governor to flight. The victorious Padre Cicero officially became the vice-governor of the state of Ceara.

In a world shattered by the continuous warfare that raged among the great families, for which the poor unfailingly paid the price, Father Cicero could institute a more peaceful society, thus improving the tragic situation of those who had nothing. He was able to do so because he spoke in the name of the highest authority, divine authority. In this way, he put himself above the fray, beyond the local quarrels — the only way to be heard by all. In a world increasingly dominated by selfish interests, only religion could unite, at least in appearance, what was separated in deed. In sermons, Father Cicero reproached the "small" and the "great", because they did not live according to the divine laws of charity, mutual aid and the forgiveness of offenses. He was thus able to put an end, at least temporarily, to the hostilities between families, to blot out discord, to renew alliances, to become the arbitrator of disputes, the indisputable and undisputed master of the region, the "little father".

His movement had a conscious function of social reform. The followers made donations to the messiah that were used to form a common fund to provide for the needs of the sick, widows and orphans; to buy land; and to finance enterprises (Joazeiro, a small hamlet in 1870, would become the second city of the province under

the stimulus of the prophet, with 70,000 inhabitants). But it also had a guardianship function for the existing system: the ideal of fraternity and equality was rigorously understood as fraternity and equality in faith and before god.

When Canudos defended its freedom with arms in 1896-1897, some men left Joazeiro to aid the commune of Monte-Santo, but the entire city didn't rise up. Yet, at that time, an insurrection in Joazeiro would have absolutely meant the greatest danger for the Republic, which was very careful not to challenge it. The state would have found itself forced to conduct a war on two fronts. Considering the tremendous difficulty that it encountered in getting the best of the rebels of Canudos, one could legitimately ask what it would have been able to do in the face of an insurrection of the entire northeast, a thing that would certainly have happened if the movement in Joazeiro had committed itself to that struggle.

In the final analysis, in a period disturbed by increasingly bitter rivalries between particular interests, Father Cicero brought social peace. This allowed the poor of the region, along with those who came from the coast, to breathe, to relax and to rediscover with him, if not the hope of a new life, at least that of a better life.

After Father Cicero died in 1934, various messianic movements developed in the *sertão*. Most of them were immediately stopped by the action of the local authorities, unless they learned to follow the example of Father Cicero and come to terms with the politicians of the region. This was the case of Pedro Batista de Silva's movement in Bahia. He succeeded in making the Santa-Brigada precinct, where he established his messianic community and over which he ruled with uncontested authority, rise in the ranks of city hall.

This was not the case of the blessed Lourenço's movement, which lasted from 1934 to 1938 and ended tragically.

In the image of the "warrior saint" Antonio Conselheiro, the blessed Lourenço founded a colony similar to Canudos in the plain of Araripe, also fully within the *sertão*. Here again, the poor — who no longer wanted to submit to slavery — occupied the land, establishing a kind of primitive communism, a phalanstery. Everything produced was held in common. This scandalous practice that openly challenged the big property owners by violating or, worse, ignoring the laws of private property (sacred laws that established the social authority of the possessors) aroused the almost immediate reaction of the united forces of the constituted order. The *sertanejos* took up arms, scythes against cannons as in Canudos, resisting to the death. They were all slaughtered after a fierce and relentless battle, but it was too unequal. After a short time, the law of the Republic again ruled over the *sertão*.

In 1938, the blessed Lourenço's movement ended in a bloodbath. It was the last revolutionary messianic movement. On July 28 of the same year, Lampião was killed with some *compadres* at Angico. His death would be the death-blow inflicted on *cangaceirismo*. The police would easily manage to get the best of the last scattered, unsettled little groups that lacked protection or complicity. The slaughter would be brutal.

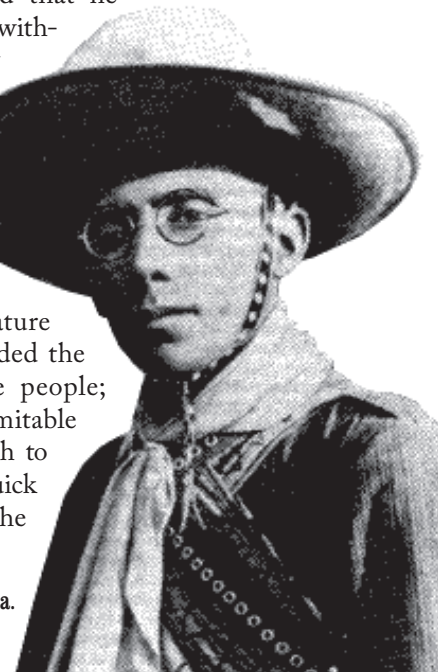
The *cangaceiro* was the social bandit of northeast Brazil, and the *cangaço* was his band. The *cangaceiro* avenged himself for a humiliation, an injustice, for the blackmail imposed by a "colonel" or the police, for the murder of a relative. He then decided to exclude himself from society and go into hiding by uniting with an already existing band, a band that would allow him to survive through organized theft and escape the police forces that were hunting for him.

An avenger more than a righter of wrongs, the *cangaceiro* embodied generalized rebellion against the whole social order.

THE *CANGACEIRO* BANDS THAT TRAVELED around the northeast at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century stood side by side with the millenarian movements. In both equally, we find the same contempt for property and thus for the law, the same taste for wealth, the same generosity, the same challenge launched against the state and its cops, the same fierce determination, the same fighting spirit, the same fury. The boundary between the two was faint when not non-existent, and the passage in either direction was easy. We know of famous bandits, seduced by the prophecies of Conselheiro, who participated in the founding of Canudos or rushed to defend it, bringing their skills and experience. Lampião thought so highly of Father Cicero's movement that he always avoided the province of Ceara in the course of the raids.

In both cases, the same people were involved.

"FROM A VERY EARLY AGE," THE UNIVERSITY student Euclydes da Cunha wrote, "the inhabitant of the *sertão* regarded life from his turbulent viewpoint and understood that he was destined for a struggle without respite that urgently demanded the convergence of all his energies… always ready for a conflict where he wouldn't be victorious, but he wouldn't be conquered." It probably wasn't the nature of the northeast that molded the fierce character of these people; but they were truly indomitable people who preferred death to slavery. They were always quick to defend their freedom, the



Virgulino "Lampião" Ferreira.

idea they had of man, a certain vision of wealth, with the greatest vigor and boldness. They stood against the entire world; and from all sides, they were destined to a struggle without respite that urgently demanded the convergence of all their energies, to a war in which they would not allow themselves to be conquered.

Whether millenarians or *cangaceiros*, they were cowhands, sharecroppers, mule drivers. They were part of the rural society that was continually threatened in its existence and substantially in its freedom. They had been produced by it. They not only found a real complicity in this society, but they also expressed its deepest aspirations. All in all, very little differentiates the two groups. The millenarians were carriers of a positive social project, but it had a religious essence, while the *cangaceiros* were carriers of a purely negative social project that was not religious in its essence.

United around a prophet through faith in the imminent arrival of the Millennium, through the same aspiration for a new life, the Brazilian millenarians formed a spiritual community that intended to organize itself in expectation of the final event, preparing for it. This messianic community did not have the ambition of realizing the Millennium itself, but it opposed the spirit of the existing world in a radical way by

recognizing itself in the community of a future world. It carried within itself a positive social project that essentially remained religious; it formed the idea of a society not yet realized and whose realization did not belong to it. It was the *premonition of this new society*.

The *cangaceiros* recognized themselves in a simple idea: revenge. Its realization touched them directly. They formed a warrior community whose social project (revenge is, indeed, a social project) was absolutely *negative* and for the most part completely personal. Each one had his revenge to carry out. It belonged to her and related to a given person or, more generally, a given family. And he intended to bring it to a good end, if he had not already done so. The entire constituted order was opposed to her revenge. By carrying it out, the *cangaceiro* challenged the entire society.

The *cangaceiro* did not criticize the society in which she lived, but the goal she pursued made him a rebel. The millenarians didn't seek to avenge themselves or, more precisely, the hour of vengeance did not belong to them, since it was up to God or a supernatural being like king D. Sabastião, but they criticized society. Thus, it was almost inevitable that they would meet, as they did, in fact, in Canudos. The state arranged to transform a spiritual community

Cangaceiras.

into a warrior community and an individual in search of revenge into a social bandit.

The insult that the *cangaceiro* had to erase came both from an individual and from the society that supported that individual, that was his accomplice. The offense didn't come from an isolated individual, from one's likes — in those days, settling such an insult would not have been a problem — but from a *social authority*. It could be an insult from a "colonel" or someone in his circle, which amounts to the same thing. The offense came from a *fazendeiro* who was invested with both a social authority as a large property holder and a political authority as a representative of the state in the region. The vengeance of the *cangaceiro*, in fact, was a *social vengeance*. Carrying it out didn't just mean confronting an individual, but also the state that stood behind him.

The *cangaceiro* made his own justice toward and against the state, which always stood on the side of the one who offended him. His inalienable and universal right as a free individual came into conflict with the objective Right of the state, the substance of which is to force the individual to alienate her universal and immediate right to freedom.

As Hegel wrote, "It is enough that the I as free being am alive in the flesh, because it is prohibited

to degrade this living existence to the rank of pack animal. While I live, my mind (which is concept and also freedom) and body are not separate; this constitutes the existence of freedom, and it is in this that I experience it. It is a sophistic concept without idea that makes the distinction according to which the thing in itself, the mind — and even the idea of it —, is not struck when the body is abused and when the existence of the person is subjugated to another's power."[37]

By avenging himself, the *sertanejo* realized his idea that all human beings were equal in their humanity; he became effectively free, for himself and for others. For him, this passage of the idea into concreteness corresponded to the passage into clandestinity. He abandoned an abstract civil existence that suddenly appeared for what it was, a servile existence. Thus, he became a *cangaceiro*.

Freedom is a risk to take. Suffering an insult without reacting means submitting to the power of another, falling into slavery. This corresponds to a person's social death, to which she can respond only with the master's death.

Faced with an essentially human reaction, the academics of our times, like Josué de Castro[38],

[37] Hegel, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Right*.

[38] Josué de Castro, *Une Zone Explosive: Le Nord-est du Brésil*.

go so far as to even speak of a nutritional deficiency to explain the rebellion of the *cangaceiros* or the millenarians and talk of flight, when the rebels had to confront the state and the world. Who knows, maybe in referring to these academics, one could have spoken of a chronic deficiency of the most elementary intelligence of human practices.

The *sertanejos* possessed this intelligence, recognizing themselves in the *cangaceiros* and appreciating them as courageous human beings who preferred to put their lives at stake than to die as slaves. The fact is that from one moment to the next any *sertanejo* might have been forced to go into hiding for similar reasons. These people were on the verge of slavery. Their existence as free human beings ceaselessly threatened to collapse into submission, to fall or return into slavery. They were always ones who lived and reacted in haste.

The *cangaceiro* showed through his actions that even the poor could become terrifying. Feared and admired, a cruel hero and a bandit with a big heart, he quickly became a mythical figure of the *sertão*.

In the *cangaceiros*' heroic deeds, it is difficult to distinguish legend from reality. The testimonies, the depositions, the poetry, the stories and the news articles accumulated and contradicted

each other. Reality itself, in which shameful self-interest, betrayal and complicity, boldness and deceit were mixed, was not only complex and contradictory, but already legendary. With the *cangaceiros*, reality had been pierced by an idea. Their story belonged to an epic poem.

In the nineteenth century, starting from Brazil's independence, social banditry spread within the country, reaching its peak at the proclamation of the Republic. Then it took on the traits of modern *cangaceirismo*, which would reach its culmination in Lampião in the 1930s.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two figures stood out: Antonio Silvino and Sebastiano (Sinhô) Pereira, with whom Virgulino Ferreira, the future Lampião, took his first steps. Legend has presented them to us as especially good and generous, in the style of social bandits like Robin Hood. Antonio Silvino was captured in 1914 and sentenced to thirty years in prison. He was released after twenty years. Sinhô Pereira withdrew into "public life".

Virgulino (Lampião) was born in 1897 in a small village in the province of Pernamboac, where his father was a sharecropper on a small plot of land and also a mule driver. One day, a detachment of the police, whose commander was linked to a hostile family, slaughtered the old man and the mother.

Virgulino and his brothers burned the mourning clothes in the barnyard and swore that from that moment on they would no longer carry on mourning, but would rather carry the gun. The sisters were entrusted to the youngest of them, while the others went into hiding. But finding themselves in an extremely precarious and uncertain situation, after a few victorious conflicts with the military police, they united with Sinhô Pereira's *cangaço*.

One of Lampião's first endeavors was the murder of "colonel" Gonzaga, director of the

***Cangaceiros* dancing in the *sertão*.**

Belmonte police in the state of Pernambouc. The man was killed with his entire family, and even the goats and chickens in the barnyard were slaughtered. Lampião removed the wedding ring from Gonzaga's corpse, put it on his finger and didn't take it off again until his final day.

When Sinhô Pereiro retired in 1922 (this could happen when one could count on the implicit blessing of Father Cicero), Virgulino became the indisputable leader of the band. Though he went on to become the most celebrated of the *cangaceiros*, he would also be the last. Lampião wrote the final chapter of a history.

His nickname, Lampião (lamp, lantern), came to him from one of his early battles. In the course of a nocturnal ambush, he had taken to firing so quickly that it lit up the night.

For nearly twenty years, throughout the *sertão*, Lampião would wander from one

province to another over an immense landscape, appearing unpredictably, scrambling his trails, always turning conflicts with the police to his own advantage.

"Let's leave civilians in peace. Against police and traitors: *fire!*"

The blows were frequently struck by small groups commanded by the best men, while the leader controlled everything. Sometimes the entire band took part in genuine war expeditions. Lampião studied routes, sought to discover where there were concentrations of money and followed the movements of the "flying squads". He was considered a "modern" bandit and used strategy and tactics most skillfully.

The band stayed hidden for long periods in a safe place, a forest, an inaccessible mountain chain, a desert oasis or the *fazenda* of a friend. The people only moved in small groups to resupply ammunition (a very difficult enterprise), to deliver messages demanding money, and to buy food and other things. They moved in a limited radius, just a dozen people with a guide, if need be; the round trip lasted a week at the longest. At times, if the situation became too hot, the band literally disappeared without leaving a trace, deliberately spreading news and signals that confused the trails, making the police and their thugs go crazy. Then the *cangaceiros* rested and recovered from the fatigue of their latest endeavors, preparing for the next ones with high spirits.[39]

Expeditions lasted several months and could cover several northeastern provinces. Lampião extorted money from the rich property owners, villages and sometimes cities of a certain importance. He presented himself with his band, receiving the money — collected from the rich, the merchants, and the property owners — directly from the local authorities. In some cases, he visited the school while the men sat in the plaza of the church, then usually everything ended with a banquet followed by dancing. The feast started with great binges of overflowing glasses of a brandy called "*la testarda*" ("the stubborn woman"). Poetic challenges were launched where the best bards confronted each other, while encounters came together and dissolved… In the night, the troop took off singing their story to the tune of "*Mulher Rendeira*":

[39] *Cangaceiros: Ballads Tragique*. Illustrations by Jô Oliveira, text by Mario Fiotani.

Olé, mulher rendeira
Olé, mulher renda
Tu me ensina a fazer renda,
Eu te ensino a namonar![40]

Sometimes things went badly. For example, during the attack on Inharéma in Paraiba, the *cangaceiros* did not succeed in taking the center of the town. Mad with rage, they retreated, destroying, looting and burning everything in their path.

"Upon returning to the state of Pernambouc at the end of 1925, Lampião occupied the city of Custodia, but in the most peaceful manner in the world. The bandits spent the day passing through the streets. Everyone paid for his purchases. All around the area sentries kept watch. Lampião extorted a few rich bastards, bought provisions, medicine and ammunition. The tailor made clothing for him, finishing it the same day, as promised, and was paid handsomely for it. Lampião sent a telegram to the state's governor, telling of all the colors, but he didn't pay for this on the pretext that the telegraph was a 'public' service. The police detachment, having

[40] "Hurrah, tenant woman, Hurrah, renter woman, You teach me how to make money, I teach you how to make love."

disappeared at the first alarm, gave no signs of life."

At Carnaiha de Flores, he surrounded the city and delivered a threatening message: if the sum requested was not handed over, he would set fire to the village and slaughter everyone. The sum was considerable, but not excessive, and so the village notables immediately began to make a collection. But suddenly a very large, unexpected "flying squad" brigade appeared, and the *cangaceiros*, warned by their sentries, prudently withdrew. Afterwards, the band presented themselves again without warning, took the dialogue that had been interrupted a few months earlier back up and obtained satisfaction.

One particularly well-known episode that was widely discussed (due to the rank of the victim) was the attack against the *fazenda* of a very rich aristocrat, the baroness of Aqua Branca. Though he didn't touch the jewelry the lady wore, Lampião plundered everything else, pins, rings, bracelets, necklaces, precious stones and other objects of gold, among which was a golden chain that he later gave to his partner Maria Bonita. She wore it until her death, after which it ended up in the pocket of some soldier or officer.

Thus, Lampião unfailingly walked his road,

Maria Bonita, partner of Lampião.

devouring mile after mile of the *sertão*.[41]

In 1926, he met Father Cicero in the holy city of Joazeiro. Along with the title of captain, he received modern armaments and ammunition from the government. He was supposed to go fight the Prestes column (Louis Carlos Prestes would later become the secretary general of the Brazilian Communist Party) that had been formed following the failed coup d'etat of the democratic officers and that had undertaken a long march through Brazil. Lampião accepted the priest's blessing, the title of captain, and the arms but took care not to attack the Prestes column, since he didn't consider it his affair.

In June 1927, Lampião set a course for an important city, Mossoró, which was even richer than the others, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. He issued a demand for a high ransom. As his whole response, the prefect sent him a package containing one rifle shell. The "captain" was enraged. In one village, the *cangaceiros* threw a merchant onto the pavement, distributing his pieces of cloth to the poor. In others, they pulverized all that came within range. It was a technique of terror.

Eventually, the *cangaceiros* divided into four groups and attacked the city. But Mossoró

[41] *Cangaceiros: Ballade Tragique.*

and its police expected them. Lampião underestimated the enemy and found himself at a disadvantage. Always a realist, he sounded the retreat and the one hundred fifty bandits fell back in perfect order. The loss was minor. The *cangaceiros* made neighboring cities pay dearly for the defeat. Lootings multiplied. But they didn't linger in Rio Grande do Norta, which had a terrain that was hostile to them (extensive plains without mountains or forest). The adventure had at least brought them a large amount of loot. Therefore, Lampião coined a maxim: if there is more than one church in a city, it is best to leave it in peace.

During the return journey to the state of Pernambouc, his most violent conflict with the police occurred; ninety-six *cangaceiros* against more than two hundred fifty *macacos*. Lampião, sure of his chances, launched himself furiously into a struggle that to all appearances should have been fatal to him. The men were divided into three groups, and the battle ended with the defeat of the state troops who, despite their machine gun, left more than twenty dead on the ground and carried away about thirty wounded. The losses on the side of the *cangaceiros* were minimal. Sometimes an act identical to a thousand others becomes a legend, but a witness has reported that he saw it with his own eyes.

So one passes from one year into another, from one state into another, recalling an adventure, a name, an anecdote or even a mere gesture.[42]

THE *CANGACEIROS* WERE TERRIFYING AND magnificent, with their leather hats shaped like half moons and decorated with a profusion of medals, silver and gold coins, collar buttons, jewels, rings, in a barbaric and prestigious luxury.

The bandolier of the rifle also overflowed with innumerable buttons and medals. Pistols and revolvers had holsters of worked and decorated leather, like the belts. Even their saddlebags were richly embellished. The unfailingly sharp dagger, about twenty-five to thirty inches long — the accessory of the true *cangaceiro* — was slid into its inlaid sheath. They were the incarnation of the mythical warrior, the *Avenger*.

They arrived suddenly. They emerged from the desert, there where they were no longer expected, to vanish as if by magic into the endless expanse of the *sertão*. In the villages they passed through, they opened the doors of the prisons and the strongboxes of the rich. They seemed to possess the gift of ubiquity.

[42] *Cangaceiros: Ballad Tragique.*

Omnipresent, they escaped police forces as if by magic, their bodies impervious to bullets, death and misfortune.

"He takes from the rich to give to the poor" — so it was said of the *cangaceiro*. In fact, the *cangaceiros* lived abundantly: always ready for battle, but dissipating the fruits of their robbery in feasts, richly decorated clothes, and thousands of acts of generosity that they dispensed around themselves. Their attitude towards wealth was the exact opposite of the great local property owners. The riches that the latter had accumulated, the *cangaceiros* distributed anew. The big landowners conceived of wealth only as private goods, which excluded others, impoverishing them. The *cangaceiros*, by consuming what they had taken, made everyone participants in the luxury.

In the ancient feudal system, power came from conquest. Now it is increasingly based on money. The *cangaceiros* represented the power that despises money. Expending their dough in purchases paid for without haggling, in banquets and in gifts was a question of honor for them.

If the state guaranteed the power of the "colonels" and the right to property — actually the right to exploit other people's labor — the *cangaceiros* seemed to revive the tradition of the *bandeirantes*, whose great and tireless warrior caravans followed one another in the conquest

of the northeast. "Far from the coast, where metropolitan decadence was found, the *bandeirantes*, profiting from extreme territories such as Pernambuco in Amazonia, seemed to belong to a different race due to their reckless courage and resistance to adversity."[43]

While the "prestige" of the *fazendeiro* was based exclusively on exploitation, the *cangaceiro* rekindled the spirit of conquest. He had gained the money that he dispensed so generously by risking his life, robbing the rich and powerful, who were loathed but feared by all.

In the 1930s, the state felt the necessity to reinforce its control over the entire northeast and to completely pacify that huge region far from central power. A vast apparatus was put into action to liquidate banditry: the reorganization of the police, the institution of checkpoints, the use of radio and telephone, the introduction of more efficient instruments, the development of roads and means of transportation. Repression intensified.

Not by chance, during the last years, Lampião remained hidden most of the time. The ranks had diminished. Ammunition had become increasingly dear and almost impossible to find.

[43] Euclydes da Cunhu, *Les Terres de Canudos*.

Toward the end, only fifty-five men remained, and when any action was carried out, it almost always occurred in small groups.

Specifically, a betrayal caused Lampião's end.

On July 28, 1938, he was poisoned in Angico, in the state of Sergipe, with some men and his partner Maria Bonita. His "*compadre*" Corisco took a terrible revenge. He massacred the entire family of the traitor, who was enrolled directly in the military police.

Corisco's history was that of all his comrades: revenge and flight. He had been drafted into the army and then deserted. Also a victim of injustice and abuse, he was further humiliated to the point of being trampled by a police deputy. He entered the *cangaço*. He quickly became the best *cangaceiro* after Lampião. He managed to find the police who had humiliated him again, took the deputy by the feet, ran him through, and inflicted a number of cuts on him with the dagger, making him bleed slowly like a pig.

After Lampião's death, Corisco continued to scour the countryside with his men for nearly two years. In March of 1940, in a small village of the *caatinga* of Bahia, surrounded with his partner Dada by the *macacos* (who also had a machine gun), he refused to surrender. He died almost an hour later.

That was the end.

Corsico and his partner Dada.

THE *CANGACEIRO* GAVE EVIDENCE IN HIMSELF of the possibility of shaking off the yoke of oppression, which is neither invincible nor eternal. Judgment can always fall, unexpected, upon the rich and powerful. The *cangaceiro* only caused the pieces to be put back in play, also showing that the struggle is pitiless and that freedom must be *conquered*. The *cangaceiro* was energy directed toward a new form of life. All things considered, the *cangaceiro* was the revolution.

This epic poem has been sung at fairs and feasts where poems are improvised. This one tells of the *Arrival of Lampião in Hell:*

There was great damage
In hell that day.
All the money that Satan
Possessed was burned.
The registry of control and more than six hundred million cruzeiros
Of merchandise alone
Were burned.

Starting in 1940, the northeast territory was completely pacified. Order was maintained through terror. The northeast was under armed occupation, even if it wasn't under ideological occupation.

It was not always this way. This omnipresence of the state generated the sleep of the Mind, a true nightmare for the poor. It prohibited any discussion about the world. The idea of the state was beyond any critique; the world had become a fatality.

The Brazilian messianic movements, on the other hand, had developed at a time when discussion was still possible. For nearly a century in that distant region, the poor had debated about the world.

The historical or human dimension seem to be absent both in Vittorio Lanternari's interpretation, which sees in them a reaction of oppressed people that "attempts to escape an

oppressive situation that holds the entire society in subjection"[44], and in Pereira de Queiroz's interpretation[45], that, contrarily, notes an aspiration to order in a society in which "a freedom that is much too great reigns, a freedom that degenerates into licentiousness."

The historical conditions that controlled the development of these movements are comparable to those that we encountered at the end of the Middle Ages in the west: an archaic social organization was decomposing, while a new social order was progressively established. The world debated about the world: the mercantile spirit versus the feudal spirit. The poor participated in their own way in the debate. They didn't want to hear about either one, especially not the mercantile spirit, *of the world that will be*. For them it wasn't a question of choosing between the past and the future; they weren't paid by the state like sociologists or historians. Much more simply, it was a matter of implacably resisting the bourgeois spirit, not because this overturned their customs, but because it was completely opposed to the idea that they developed of a

[44] Vittorio Laternari, *Les Mouvements Religieux des Peuples Opprimés*.

[45] Pereira de Queiroz, *Réforme et Révolution dans les Sociétés Traditionelles*.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Maria Bonita; Pancada and Maria Jovina;
Lampião and a *cangaceira*; Lampião and a *cangaceiro*.

human society. This is an excellent reason! They really struggled against progress, progress in the world of capitalist thought.

Thus they initiated in practice a debate of ideas between their social project and the social project of capital — between the idea they have of a human social practice and money as social practice.

The millenarian movements of the medieval era were at the center of an historical mutation from feudal to mercantile society. This mutation was already completed almost everywhere in the world when the Brazilian movements appeared. It was as if they found themselves at the historical edge of the mutation, a situation that explains their purely messianic character. They were expecting a cosmic upheaval, the hour of god's vengeance was supposed to arrive at any moment. For the most radical medieval millenarians, *the hour had come* to accomplish that upheaval; with god's help, they participated actively in the earthly realization of the Millennium, whereas the Brazilian messianic movements could only prepare for it.

The millenarian insurrections of medieval Europe had to confront an old and new principle. They were immediately critical in the face of the Church and Money. The fact is that

the Church was an historical tradition and Money was an historical novelty. The society of northeast Brazil was religious in essence, but the Church had few roots there. As to the bourgeoisie, they were nonexistent. The poor wouldn't have entered into direct conflict with the Church or merchants. They would have risen up against a mentality that insinuated itself into society, transforming minds. When conflict broke out, it was immediately against the state.

The messianic movements developed in a region that still did not know modern conditions of exploitation; an arid, often desert-like region that didn't interest either the big merchants or industrialists. The wageworker was practically unknown there. But this area was surrounded by the modern world and modern mentality. To the south, the capitalist point of view had been imposed since the beginning of the previous century with the great coffee plantations. This monoculture addressed itself solely to exportation; it was completely dependent on the laws of competition, from the international market and stock market speculation. It required a modern organization of work, an industrial discipline. It constituted this social control by itself. It was its essence, because it created the conditions of an absolute dependence on money

in practice. The seacoast to the east, which had been employed in mercantile exchange with the metropolis from the start, very quickly found itself in a process of modernization of this activity. The "*senhores de engenho*", the masters of the primitive sugar refineries, could no longer bear foreign competition. Slavery itself, which cost much too much, had been abolished by the republic and replaced with a more rational form of exploitation, wage labor, that made the worker directly dependent on money. With the aid of foreign capital, new factories were built, leading to a growing demand for sugar cane. The masters launched themselves into the acquisition of land: a devouring eagerness, no problem of fertility, it was enough to plant more and more there. And where one could not plant, one raised livestock.

This is how the capitalist mentality penetrated bit by bit into the *sertão*, deeply disrupting customary relationships; it was necessary to make money, and as quickly as possible. Furthermore, the conditions of exploitation became draconian: many found themselves without land or work, in the darkest, most desperate misery. They fled *en masse* from the coast, where it was impossible to survive, taking refuge in the interior. Since this disoriented population was not integrated by force into the

system, they went to swell the ranks of those who followed the millenarian prophets. Eventually, the exchanges between the interior and the coast that balanced social life in the *sertão* — leather for saddler-making or for packaging rolls of tobacco, oxen for sugar mills and plantations — would be brutally compromised by capitalist industrialization. This rupture in the exchanges would have tragic consequences for small farmers, cowhands and sharecroppers; it would call the relationship that linked the cowhand or the sharecropper to the owners of the land back into question. All this was reflected in local disputes, exacerbating them.

The millenarian movements developed in a region of relative freedom, where neither the state nor the church was omnipresent. But this region suffered the repercussions of the capitalist offensive from within this process due to the force of circumstance. Little by little, the traditional "client" relationships were replaced with indifferent, impersonal relationships, *money relationships*. From that moment on, betrayal was in the air. Respect for giving one's word was replaced with the value of money that respects no one's word. Deprived of all dignity by the allure of profit, the large property holders betrayed customary rights without scruples and did their best to make the existence of the

poor abominable. There was now something rotten in the *sertão*.

At one time, the animal breeders, property owners, cowhands and sharecroppers generally led the same life. The family formed the basic cell of society, not the conjugal family, but a great family, an "extended family". The ties were formed from a familial nucleus (brothers and sisters, cousins, godchildren) and from one's clientele (bastard branches, sharecroppers and old slaves). But these lineages had a leader. Within the family group, all those who had the same preeminent position received the title of *colonel*, but there was also a "colonel of colonels".

An unspoken contract of *exchange of services* ensured the cohesion of the group and reinforced the position of the colonel, who had the duty of helping relatives and his faithful men: transfer of land, respect for sharecropping contracts (the cowhand possessed a part of the herd just like the sharecropper had a part of the harvest, a part fixed by custom), loans, guarantees of judiciary defense… this entailed a *moral obligation* that put those involved at the colonel's service. Repayment in money was rare when it occurred at all.

Political power always formed the biggest stake in the struggles that opposed clans to

each other in the interior of Brazil. The colonel was born to command; he had inherited the land and derived his power from this. The state only reinforced him with its safeguards, with its legal aid. The colonel was determined to jealously defend his social position. He enjoyed absolute impunity. It was said that the activity of a colonel who was respected was envisaged by every page of the penal code. He protected and conserved his power and prestige by maintaining genuine bands of armed men, into which the men who depended upon his jurisdiction were conscripted during times of conflict between families. He was the real authority of the region.

No limits were imposed on the colonel, except respect of his word and tradition; all were at the mercy of his will. Greed could make him a terrible man. Thus, treachery was the immediate threat; everything was in danger of falling into the most arbitrary abuse. This left the clans susceptible to edginess capable of provoking, at the least sign, a series of conflicts within and among themselves.[46]

[46] Needless to say, today arbitrary power is total and guaranteed.

Millenarians and *cangaceiros* rose up in a society where relationships were still personal, where solidarity still had a meaning, but where latent unrest existed due to the progressive disintegration of these relationships. They originated in a crumbling society, undermined a bit at a time by capitalist ideology that made traditional relationships fall away. This ideology would aggravate society, exacerbate touchiness, arouse appetites. The large property owners would get involved in an implacable competition that would eliminate the weakest and empower the strongest.

In general, Brazilian messiahs didn't condemn the old organization so much as the eagerness for profit manifested more and more by the colonels, making them forget their obligations. Cowhands and sharecroppers fully suffered the consequences of this. They could historically situate the start of this degeneration of relationships and compare this new state of things to a not-too-distant-past. The messianic movements expressed the desire to move toward solidarity at a time when all feelings of solidarity were tending to disappear.

Two directions could be perceived: taking tradition back up and reinforcing it with a higher principle, divine authority, *the patronage of God,* as Father Cicero's movement did;

or going beyond the old organization, which revealed itself to be unable to resist the capitalist mentality and the increase of selfishness, in order to again find the meaning of the original community.

They had recourse to religion as the objective spirit of community, in order to seal the pact of alliance. According to that spirit, catholic ritual consecrated the links that united them. Such rites constituted the solemn affirmation of the refusal of the old world that had become profane and the entry into a new world that only now presented a sacred character.

"Once the Holy City was founded, the messiah tried to identify it as much as possible with Holy Places. Particularly in the northeast, the landscape lends itself to surprising comparisons with that of Judea as it might be seen reproduced in the crude religious images on sale at the fairs of the *sertão*. Father Cicero had quite ably baptized the ruggedness of the terrain around Joazeiro with names drawn from the gospel: the Mount of Olives, the Garden of the Holy Sepulcher, Calvary. Decorated with small chapels and numerous crosses, these places attracted the curious, moved pilgrims and constituted new evidence of the holiness of the places."[47]

[47] Pereira de Queiroz.

These were not heretical movements in the true sense of the word, even though the church condemned them. They did not criticize the sacraments as the disciples of Amaury de Bêne, the Taborites or the Anabaptists had done in their times. They contented themselves with opposing authentic catholicism — their own — to the corrupted catholicism of the priests.

If religious sentiment was deeply rooted in society, the Church was not the citadel of thought that it had been in medieval times, and the efforts of some country curates to fight popular traditions were ridiculous. This did nothing but reinforce the feeling in the peasant that only the *beatos*, their messiahs, knew authentic catholicism.

Besides, it was rare to see the priests who happened to live in those remote regions that corresponded to the ideal the poor had of the christian life. The *sertanejos* criticized them especially for selling various rites. This is why they felt a strong resentment toward the official clergy who were accused of betraying their function in its most sacred aspect. The sermons of the messiahs reflected this opinion. Severino, one of Lourenço's apostles, proclaimed: "God's word is not sold at any price; God's word is free."

In the legends of the Iberian peninsula, the Brazilian prophets always drew their inspiration

from popular catholicism. Their way of life corresponded perfectly to the idea that peasants had about catholic saints. They were pilgrims who lived on handouts, distributing the gifts they received to the poor. The catholicism that was fed by legends, mysteries, superstition, familiarity and mysticism, was *essentially millenarian*.

"Time seems to have stopped for the uncouth population of the *sertão*. Having sidestepped the general movement of human development, it still breathes the moral atmosphere of the illuminated…"[48]

They expected God's vengeance, but this expectation was dynamic. The poor started to organize themselves for concrete actions like the occupation of land and energetic defense of their conquests. It was an expectation that, far from preventing social activity, incited it. Canudos was the Tabor of the *sertão,* where an intense activity reigned. The millenarians were animated by an enthusiasm that nothing could crush. They did not isolate themselves, and they were not isolated. They did not feel that they were the elect. They were *sertanejos*, *jagunços*. The spirit of their activity was simply changed.

[48] Euclydes de Cunha.

This spirit, which inspired the disciples of Lourenço for example, resembled that which had inspired the diggers' colony on Saint George hill in London in 1649: "He who works for another, for payment or to pay a penalty, does not carry out just work; but he who is resolved to work and eat together with everyone else, in this way making the earth a common treasury, gives Christ a hand in liberating creation from slavery and cleansing everything of the original curse." (Winstanley)

Like pastor Lee of England in 1650 ("A hedgerow in a field is as necessary in its way as authority in the Church or the State"), the Brazilian state deluded itself. The occupation of land, even though for religious purposes, was in itself a challenge to authority. It was not the intention of the Brazilian millenarians to enter into open war with the state. They were waiting for God's vengeance, but in their waiting challenged the state.

For them, this collective organization of work, this common activity, did not represent wealth. Perhaps the spirit was enriched by this experience, but it did not find its wealth in itself; it was formed from its *beyond*. The wealth that the messiahs promised to their faithful, an ever-recurring promise in their sermons, could not, in any case, be confused with prosperity

and well-being, nor, and this is the essential thing, could it be reduced to a limited common activity, however human it might be. It had to be the conclusion of social activity, the moment of infinite squandering, of the feast, and the moment hoped for was that of its *universality*.

An entire world stood opposed to its realization.

APPENDIX ONE:

An Introduction to Millenarianism

by Georges Lapierre

The violent flight from the world on the paths of Compostela to the refuge of prayer, the sanctuary of the Church, and the oasis of grace of monastic life were fortunately not the only impulses of the men and women of the Middle Ages toward salvation and eternal life. Another equally powerful current drew many of them toward another desire: the realization of paradise on earth, the return of the golden age. This is the current of millenarianism, the dream of a Millennium, a thousand years of happiness; eternity established, or rather restored, on earth.

Unlike their contemporaries, millenarians did not exchange their dreams for reality, since they wanted to realize them, something quite different and spiritual in another way, finally enjoying the infinite wealth of the Spirit. To cowardly renunciation, they opposed refusal, insurrection, revolution.

Millenarian belief develops on the essence of the apocalypse. The apocalypse is the affirmation of a decisive renewal: the heavenly Jerusalem will descend to earth. The myth is charged with revolutionary dreams, or, better, revolutionary dreams carry the millenarian myth within themselves. The millenarian myth is the self-consciousness of these movements,

which find their project in it, draw their common language from it, receive their reason, and even more, their basis from it.

Just as the critique of the state has far too often remained on the terrain of politics, so also the critique of the world of religion has been able to be religious. This was the case for millenarian movements that tried to realize religion without suppressing it, so that realization and suppression remained in the dominion of the imaginary. This has allowed many historians, Le Goff among them, to settle old scores with these movements, with the full satisfaction of the good bourgeois or stalinist conscience: "The nagging desire to go 'to the depths of the unknown in order to find the new' that millenarianism reveals is not able to imagine a truly new world. The Golden Age of the people of the Middle Ages is only a return to origins. The future was behind them. They marched facing backwards."

Rejecting them in this way as a kind of religious anachronism means trying to place these movements beneath any critique. We begin to imagine why. We think, however, that they were one of the essential moments of the critique of the world, if not the essential moment. For us, the critique of millenarian movements

in fact finds itself at the heart of modern critical thought.

Some radical elements — the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the London revolutionaries, the Piccardi of Bohemia, the Anabaptists of Münster — emerged within these movements, attempting to construct a practice (and thought) that put the world order in danger. Their limits were their defeats, not in thought, but in death.

Speaking of millenarian movements thus leads to the recognition of the radicalism that they embodied, raising questions about the power of religious representation that, in most cases, they were not able to overcome and suppress.

The revolutionary interest of millenarian movements, as opposed to heresies and other forms of religious dissidence, consists in the fact that these movements took issue with the *world of religion* and not simply — as was the case with the Waldensians, the Cathars, the moderate Hussites and later the Lutherans — with the Catholic Church, its dogmas and practice, meaning religion as part of society.

However much it may have had to remain for the most part religious, the critique that

millenarian movements represented got beyond the restricted and institutionalized framework of theology. They proposed neither a reform of the Church nor the institution of a new dogmatism, even though this was able to form the point of departure for certain movements such as the Hussites, for example, but rather the radical transformation of a world in which religion "is presented at the same time as society itself, as a part of society, and as an instrument of unification" (G. Debord).

In short, we can say that their opposition was not "formal" but religious, to the extent to which it was a question of realizing religion, and that such opposition remained religious because this *rough* critique of religion was defeated with arms. What interested millenarians was not the form of religion, but its *essence* — not the form that alienation might assume, but its reality.

Religion held back all human hopes in another life. It presented itself adorned with unknown and mysterious beauty. Its attraction was that of the Spirit, its fascination, irresistible. Human beings skimmed the idea of a world from it. If identification with religion meant acceptance of the earthly fate and the removal of the desire to escape it, the critique of religion had to imply the negation of this

common fate that was thus to become something to which one would no longer submit. Let's note that our relationship to the spectacle is constructed on the same terms and that identification with the spectacle implies acceptance of daily life and ignorance of its poverty. But there is an important difference: this relationship is no longer of a religious essence, but of a religious *nature*.

With religion, the spirit of the world still had a name, it was knowable, or at least *one could still speak of it and not be deprived of it*. With the commodity, the spirit of the world no longer has a name; it is absolute outward appearance. Marx is simultaneously right and wrong when he speaks of "commodity fetishism". The commodity certainly fully contains the spirit, but as outward appearance; the spirit is now the thing that cannot be named. The spectacle is religious representation that has been objectified. The world of the spectacle, like the world of religion, is the place of separated consciousness, and the unification that the spectacle accomplishes remains in the dominion of the imaginary. But this identification is now carried out in the most complete silence. (In other times, the priestly caste seemed to speak of the Spirit in a wise and mysterious language that it wanted to keep inaccessible to common

mortals with the aim of drawing privilege from it. Today, administrators are reduced to trying vainly to draw privilege from maniacal and obsessively detailed analyses of the merits of some particular commodity).

The dream of religion was something lived collectively, whereas the dream of the commodity, with its promise of happiness, is lived in isolation. Dressed up with all the allure of the desirable, the commodity presents itself before the lonely crowd. With religion, alienation was subjective, within the reach of everyone's thought; the idea of god, or that of paradise, remained an idea that was communicated. The commodity is within reach of everyone's eye, but definitively beyond the reach of thought, its idea completely inaccessible.

The master-slave relationship is lived directly, and it is precisely what is not lived, the dialectical resolution of this relationship, that is found far away in a spectacular or religious representation. Like religion, the spectacle is generally presented as a concrete, or imaginary, inversion of life. Inequality, lived directly, finds its imaginary resolution in the religion of equality in God, or rather humanity. The poverty of an activity separated from its spirit finds its imaginary resolution in the spectacle of wealth, where the reciprocity between money and commodity carried out.

As a consequence of a social relationship, religion cannot be separated from the totality of the world; humanity is realized in a world without humanity; religion is "the heart of the unreality of real society" (G. Debord).

Trying to base an historical activity in the framework of a religious representation of the end of history would have meant running the risk of going astray in the sphere of the imaginary and counting on aid from the Beyond.

If millenarian movements always depicted salvation as collective, the faithful had to benefit from it as a collectivity. Earthly salvation was realized on earth and not in a paradise belonging to the other world — immanent, total (in other words, it had to completely transform life on earth), and universal. It was also depicted as *miraculous* in the sense that it had to be realized by supernatural agents and with their aid. These movements were located in the sphere of a religion of salvation that was that of the Jews before it became that of the Christians, defined by the expectation of a Messiah or of his return.

A complete Jewish (the Dream of the Book of Daniel, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Apocalypse of Esdras) and christian (the Book of

Revelation, Montanism, the Sibylline Oracles of the Middle Ages) religious tradition comes to increment a *social myth*, that of the end of history. This tradition nurtures the idea of history conceived as a temporal transition, or more accurately as an initiating passage, necessary for the realization of humanity, for its redemption, before its return into the bosom of God. (For primitives, initiation was conceived as a passage, generally painful, from one world to another, from innocence to knowledge. For the christian, initiation is considerably extended, to life for the individual, to history for the community, *the time of Suffering*; this is where the concept of life as a passage comes from. We note that for the christian, it was the desire for knowledge that drove man from paradise where he had lived in innocence, throwing him into the trial of history). We can speak of a social myth, since it is really a question of a dramatic representation of the end of history through the intervention of supernatural heroes.

Excluded from official dogma, the belief in the millennium survived in the underground world of popular religion. This belief, christian but critical, presents a transformation of mythical, "primitive" thought. The life of the community is to have a history, to know

a destiny, since it remains open to a supernatural intervention that will radically transform it, causing it to carry out a qualitative leap.

History conceived as Destiny is dressed back up in a mythical form that is defined by the return, or the possibility of the return, of the timeless heroes of myth into time. In Judeo-christian thought, the legendary hero of myth makes, or might make, his appearance in history to be incarnated in this or that historical personage with the aim of carrying out his redemptive or eschatological mission.

"Monotheistic religions were a compromise between myth and history, between cyclic time and irreversible time. As a whole, time is oriented toward a single final event: 'The kingdom of God is at hand'. These religions are born on the terrain of history, and they are established in it. But even there, they are maintained in radical opposition to history. Semi-historical religion determines a qualitative point of departure in time — the birth of Christ, the flight of Mohammed — but its irreversible time in fact turns out to be inverted in religion's thought as a *count-down*: the expectation, in diminishing time, of access to the other, true world, the expectation of universal Judgment. Eternity has escaped cyclical time. It is its beyond." (G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*)

Myth is a dramatic representation that is situated in a timeless past and that defines present social organization. With monotheistic religions, we are dealing with an open dramatic representation which has its beginning located in a timeless past (the drama of original sin and the fall) and its end in a timeless future (the drama of the Apocalypse and the Last Judgment) so that the historical time between the beginning and the end is itself a dramatic time, *a time of expectation for the final event*. It is a time opened upon myth and experienced through miracles, signs and premonitions, in which supernatural heroes could intervene at any moment.

The Catholic Church will strive to make this time a time without history, where nothing unsettling can happen, something finite between two beyonds, but it is only now that we know a purely secular time, a time without spirit, irreversible and monotonous.

At the beginning of the fifth century, Saint Augustine explained in *The City of God* that the Apocalypse should be interpreted as a spiritual allegory and that the Church is the flawless realization of the Millennium. Since the Catholic Church was institutionalized by this time, this theory took on value as dogma.

As for the social misery that results from the fall, it will only find its real solution in a timeless future, situating the Kingdom of God in a place beyond time, life and history. The Church that claims to be the realization of the Millennium in fact represents the ideal of equality only as an ideal: all human beings are equal before God. On the other hand, it recognizes what exists, social inequality, not only as the unavoidable consequence of original sin, but also as a remedy to corrupt human nature, as atonement.

Millenarian revolts want to establish "the Kingdom of God" on earth and for this reason must destroy what exists and thence the Church that safeguards what exists, that safeguards inequality in the name of the ideal of equality that it claims to call forth.

The millenarian movement, *as social movement*, unfolds in the historical world and intends to realize the revolution of this world. Every idea that reestablishes history (Joachim of Fiore will be heard with enthusiasm. *As a religious movement*, it remains the prisoner of a myth, a dramatic representation of history and its realization, and will fervently listen to all the prophecies about the end of history.

"The millenarians were bound to be defeated because they couldn't recognize their own activity in revolution. The fact that they await an external sign of God's decision in order to act is the translation on the level of thought of the practice according to which insurgent peasants follow leaders taken from outside their own. The peasant class could not reach a proper awareness of the functioning of society and of the way to conduct its own struggle. It is because it lacked these conditions of unity in its action and its awareness that it expressed its project and conducted its war according to the iconography of an earthly paradise."

—G. Debord

We propose to refute the above thesis on the following points: millenarians were not defined as a class, but *negatively* in recognizing the same enemy. The German peasant war of 1525 to which Debord seems to be referring was an offensive, imbued with millenarian hope, carried out against princes for the protection of threatened ancestral rights. In some cases forcing the lords to become their leaders, the peasants only acted to call them back to their duty. This offensive got ready to clearly become a millenarian uprising that brought peasants, miners and laborers together in Thuringia with

Münzer; the enemy was then defined without the least bit of ambiguity.

The peculiarity of millenarian movements is in touching those who are on the verge of being excluded from society: indebted peasants, laborers, urban proletarians, human beings without purpose. And it is false to claim that they did not have a proper awareness of the functioning of society.

What Marx said of modern proletarians, we could easily say of the weavers of Brugge and Ghent, the *Ciompi* of Florence, the English peasants of 1381 or the German peasants of 1525: "It is a class of civil society that is no longer a class of civil society."

The myth of the Golden Age gave a unity of action and awareness to these insurrections that modern rebellions no longer know. It brought a cohesive strength to these movements, even though sometimes they were unable to conceive of the revolution as *solely* their activity.

If Debord is right to point out that this is "already a modern revolutionary tendency, which still lacks the awareness of only being historical," he nonetheless remains a prisoner of a "marxist" analysis of history and class struggle. Millenarians did not in fact define themselves as a social class, and with reason.

Rodney Hilton is constrained, with some difficulty, to recognize this: "Despite considerable differences, these movements of the late Middle Ages possessed a feature that united them: the birth of a class consciousness. It was a class consciousness perceived negatively inasmuch as they didn't give definition to their own class but to that of their enemy."

They defined themselves much more radically as poor, excluded from a past community, and they knew how to find an adversary, the world.

Millenarian movements have originated in regions that suffered a rapid process of social change due to mercantile activity and where the increase of wealth is accompanied by an increased pauperization, by the exclusion of ancient rural and urban communities.

"As we have seen again and again […]," Norman Cohn writes in his book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, "revolutionary millenarianism flourishes only in certain specific social situations. In the Middle Ages, the people for whom it had most appeal were neither peasants firmly integrated in the life of the village or manor, nor artisans firmly integrated in their guilds. […] they might revolt or they might accept their situation, but they were not, on the whole, prone to follow some inspired *propheta* in a hectic pursuit of the Millennium. These *prophetae*

found their following rather where there existed an unorganized, atomized population, rural or urban or both […] Revolutionary Millenarianism drew its strength from a population living on the margin of society…"

It would be interesting to determine to what extent the myth of the Apocalypse, along with the recourse to a supernatural hero, endures when the revolt of the poor takes on the dimension of an authentic social movement, as was the case with the Pastoral crusade.

Furthermore, at the end of his book Norman Cohn recognized that the religious expression to which millenarians had recourse is only an aspect or a moment of a social critique that bears directly on the organization of society, in fact on the only social relationship that effectively exists, the master-slave relationship.

"When, finally, one comes to consider the anarcho-communist millenarian groups which flourished around the close of the Middle Ages, one fact is immediately obvious: it was always in the midst of some wider revolt or revolution that a group of this kind emerged into daylight. This is equally the case with John Ball and his followers in the English peasants' revolt of 1381; with the extremists [the Taborites and Adamites] during the early stages of the Hussite revolution

in 1419-21; and with Thomas Müntzer and his 'league of the Elect' in the German peasants' revolt of 1525. And it is true, also, of the radical Anabaptists at Münster…" (N. Cohn)

Like myth, religion originates in social life and in exchange gives it a basis. It is born from existing social relationships and in exchange safeguards them. The Judeo-christian religion originates in the master-slave relationship and in exchange establishes this relationship so that it is the whole of social life, whereas for antiquity up until the Roman Empire, this relationship was only one particular aspect of social life. Criticizing social life thus also means criticizing religion, and, inversely, criticizing religion means criticizing social life as well. The radicality of millenarians, which consists in saying that the world is of a religious nature and that it is not a question of denouncing the religious nature of the world but of using it up, of realizing religion, has been able to express itself outside of all religious representation of the end of the world, both in the course of the great social movements of the Middle Ages, and in more individual ways with the Brethren of the Free Spirit.

"It has generally been held that the three great peasant uprisings of the fourteenth century — the rising in Maritime Flanders between 1323 and 1328, the *Jacquerie* of 1358 and the English rising of 1382 — were all of them directed solely towards limited aims of a social and political nature. In reality this would seem to be less true of the English revolt […] Indeed, it may be tentatively suggested that millenarian expectations may have lain behind several of the more surprising by-products of the revolt: the burning of the palace of the Savoy and the destruction of all its treasures by Londoners who would take nothing whatsoever for themselves…" (N. Cohn).

However, it would be more appropriate to reverse the terms of this phrase and say that behind the immediate and secondary demands, a radical idea developed that proposed to change the face of the world: "He says, Look! Look! Shame on anyone who does not acknowledge that all gentlemen must be destroyed." (*Jacque*, speech reported by Froissart) Is this perhaps one of the "limited aims of a social… nature" of which Norman Cohn speaks?

In 1180, the *Capputiati*, a revolutionary organization of the poor of the Central Massif, proclaimed universal equality and freedom for all. From 1360 to 1380, there were the *Tuchini* in Auvergne and Languedoc, whose favorite "prey" were clergymen, nobles and merchants.

They were often able to avenge themselves for the fate they had to suffer.

But above all it is the Taborite movement that should attract our attention due to its complexity and scope. In appearance, it was simultaneously a nationalist movement (struggle of the Czechs against domination by a German minority), a religious movement (reform of the Church that becomes a national church) and a social movement (revolt of the poor and the guilds against the patricians).

Little by little, increasingly important differences began to appear between a reformist tendency that sought to compromise at all costs and a nucleus that became increasingly radical. The war against the Empire would allow the reformist tendency to prevail over the radical wing, but at its own expense.

In July 1419, the population of Prague rose up, stormed the municipal building and hurled the new councilors out the window. The movement's radicalism very quickly received massive aid from the peasants.

Starting at this time, the radical elements of the Hussite movement began to separate from the moderates (or Utraquists) and develop along their own line. They formed communities, embryos of a society completely outside the feudal world: the Taborites. They seem to have

been in close connection with adepts of the Free Spirit, although at the beginning the Waldensian tendency dominated. These communities were distinguished by holding everything in common and by the refusal to work.

The moderate Hussites very quickly joined with conservative Catholics in persecuting the Taborites, and this movement radicalized by entering into open war against all those who were not on their side.

In March 1420, the truce between moderate Hussites and emperor Sigismund ended. A Catholic army invaded Bohemia. The country entered into war under the command of Jan Žižka, who had to drive back the invader battle after battle. Žižka was a Taborite, and Taborites bore much of the conflict.

For the Taborites, the Millennium was to be characterized by the return of a lost community and its global restoration: "All people will live together as brothers, no one will be subjected to another."

But within Tabor itself the experience of absolute freedom began to be abandoned, and the Piccards, who maintained the doctrine of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, were thrown out. They were to become famous with the name that their enemies gave them, the Adamites of Bohemia. Žižka interrupted a

Jan Žižka, as portrayed in Jan Matejko's *Battle of Grunwald.*

campaign in order to dispose of the Piccards. The survivors took refuge on an island in the Nezarka river from where they carried out constant nocturnal raids: "He who is not with us is against us." They were exterminated on October 21, 1421.

The following year a counter-revolution put an end to the Taborite movement, and effective power was concentrated increasingly in the hands of the nobility.

Beyond the borders, on all sides, the rich and privileged, clergymen and laypeople, were obsessed with the fear of seeing the Taborite influence extend and generate a revolution that would have overturned the social order from top to bottom. The Taborite influence was found again in the High Rhine region in the movement known under the collective name of *Bundschuh*, which brought together peasants and the urban poor. The *Bundschuh* revolt broke out in the diocese of Spire in 1502, seeking to overturn all authority. Although the movement was repressed, there were uprisings of the same sort in 1513-1517.

Little by little, the millenarian fire is starting to go out at the same time as the religious world is completed, not as the millenarians desired, through its realization, but

through its transformation into the world of the spectacle, not with them but against them. First they would be crushed with weapons and then in thought by the state and the commodity.

When commodity as social relationship penetrates the feudal world in depth (starting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), radically transforming it, religion becomes separate from the social experience that is established. It disappears as the self-consciousness of society and thus as a tool for unification. From the moment that it is no longer the thought of the experience of the world, it is transformed into the opposite in all its determinations. Once it was the bearer of a truth above the world, but now it will no longer be anything but an obscuring element, when not a mere police of thought in the form of ideology or a police of habit in the form of morality. From the tool of unification that it once was, it turns into a tool of division: religious wars come after millenarian revolutions. Thought of separation, as separated thought it becomes the agent of separation. Ruling classes will make a political use of religion.

The meaning of words is obscured. The state participates in this. The state prepares to take the place of religion, but as the imaginary realization of Species Being: "In other times the

king had no feasts except for those of his subjects. But now, with the construction of the modern state and its apparatus of representation, the subjects have to celebrate the festivals of their prince." Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the passage from "monarchy by divine right" to the "divine nature of monarchy" takes place. Louis XIV offers himself to be seen as the Species Being. What is absolute in him is outward appearance. Being is no longer thought; it is seen. What is absolute is the mutilation *in thought* of the individual and the species. The spectacle is the heir of religion, but with an unimaginable, disastrous consequence for the poor.

Nonetheless, this visibility of the divine nature of the state can lead one to think, and it is still too much. For the bourgeoisie it will be a question of organizing its invisibility; "monarchy was the complete expression of this alienation, the republic is its negation within its own sphere" (Marx). The separation of church and state means the passing of the religious nature of the state into invisibility. This is how religion as a part of society has been used to disguise the religious nature of the state as well as to deny the spirituality of commodities and money.

This passage into invisibility was in fact allowed by the mutation of the role of the state.

The state was the realization of Species Being only for the time necessary to permit the generation of the commodity. The spectacular separation of church and state really corresponds to the substitution of the state for the church as the mediator between the generic activity of commodities and individuals.

Human essence no longer appears today as Being generating Being, as something static, as *state* (omnipresent and unmoving God). The commodity circulates; it is transformed into money, and money into commodity, that is continually modified. For it, motionlessness is comparable to death, since it is above all an activity. Human essence now appears as *social activity that generates social activity*, as communication. Millenarians conceived of revolution as the union of the individual and the species, as access to one's sovereignty, to self-awareness. This awareness had to flow into a social activity that was one of mutual *recognition*. But they found themselves strangely lacking when they had to organize the conditions of this recognition. They were not able to conceive of it as communication, as social activity that is constructed rationally. The fact that most of the time they recognized themselves as the elect often left them isolated in society.

In the Middle Ages, we found ourselves facing a rational idea that expressed itself in an irrational manner, but this rationality is what allowed this thought to reveal itself — which caused us to say that the world of Religion was at the mercy of its truth. Today our entire experience of the world is irrational and meaningless, and thus does not reveal itself. Because its rationality is found outside us, outside the field of our thought, it is a rationality of outward appearance. When the use of words is lost in things, at the moment when things make use of words, their meaning is lost to us. When commodities communicate, the state can take possession of communication without fear, since we have lost its use.

Today, the state carries out the same role in thought that was played by the church in other times, doing so in such a way that the principle of the world is and remains beyond criticism, but with greater ease, to the extent to which it has access to objectivity. Money is the means through which the principle, money, is realized as principle… To our misfortune.

APPENDIX TWO:

"No Age Like Unto This Age"

by Yves Delhoysie and Georges Lapierre

The christian religion, above all, held a promise of future life. It was the conception of a society in search of a purpose outside itself, redemption. Religion realized, in thought, the passage from down here (misery) to the beyond (the Kingdom of God). The sacraments were the rites of passage conceived in theory. Religion is the thought form of alienation. Millenarians attacked alienation in theory and practice. They intended to realize the things of which humanity was dispossessed, that were exiled to heaven, here on earth. This is why they attacked everything that opposed this realization, unflinchingly calling the social order into question. This is what distinguished them from mysticism — that of Meister Eckhart or Jacob Böehme.

Wanting to realize the Kingdom of God, they were led to attack the root of alienation, its foundation on earth. In other words, they carried out the movement that was the opposite of alienation: bringing what had been exiled to heaven back to earth. But they brought it back in this imaginary form, just as they had snatched from its celestial existence. Thus, earthly life came to be transfigured, covering itself with an imaginary, miraculous character.

Millenarians attempted to construct the new life in the image of the celestial City. So their primary concern was to found cities that were supposed to be the imitation of the mythical Jerusalem: Tabor, Münster, Canudos, villages entirely rebuilt in Melanesia during the cargo cults.

They drew their inspiration from the portion of social experience that was wrapped in secrecy. This portion formed the unconscious of a society, the sum of its anxieties and aspirations, which express themselves in dreams and myths. In mythical history, prophets found the intelligence of human history that allowed them to give these dreams and visions coherence (for people of those times, the dream was a method of awareness that allowed them to decipher an historical enigma; thus, they recognized the deep rationality of the dream, harmonizing their general interests). In this way, everything that was forced back into secrecy could reemerge in the light of day in a communicable form. Prophecies were one instance of this communication. An underground idea found its eloquent expression there. The unity of life thus came to be reestablished against the social order. As Freud and later Reich described it, the unconscious exists only in societies where

vulgar materialist thought and bourgeois rationalism predominate. It is the unconscious of the isolated individual, desperately alone with his suffering. Suffering is precisely the part of individual experience — that of dissatisfaction — that is rational, but that society drives back. Today, suffering no longer comes from the unconscious, except in order to be cured by psychiatrists. It is thought of as an individual ailment. In the christian world, a passageway existed from individual ailment to social evil. Religion was rooted in suffering ("only those who suffer think of God"). The poor found words that made misfortune intelligible, communicable. Popular religiosity diverted the discourse of the Church in this way. Today, everyone's suffering is an enigma that has become indecipherable.

The meaning of unhappiness has faded for the poor of our time. Freud considered anguish to be a purely individual tragedy, even though he admitted that it was an effect of the existing society. He could pose the problem in this way since the individual lived in a society without communication. Anguish and neurosis only show the absence of communication in which everyone is immersed; it is thus the tragedy of an inhuman society, something Freud never said. For him, anguish and neurosis were

individual affairs that in his view did not pose any social question. With the prophets, anguish acquired an historical function, being seen as a social and collective tragedy.

Thus, the enthusiasm of millenarians was based on a common experience, the meaning of which they had seized. They were sure of themselves. This is what historians superficially reproach them for — not being able to spot what would lead to such certainty!

The idea of christianity contained the idea of community; this was addressed to all the faithful, rich and poor. Millenarians held that this community could only achieve its reality by excluding the rich, oppressors and liars. Thus they brought it back to the social considerations from which religion had abstracted it. They wanted it to be of consequence to their doctrine. But they defined this community as a condition in which the path from the individual to the human species was realized in its spirit. Unity was immediately granted; it was the community of the elect. They did not imagine the activity of *communication*, but its *result*. Already in christianity the individual communicated with her kind in the figure of Christ; his relationship with the other was exhausted in this.

Feuerbach wrote, "Among christians God is nothing but *the intuition of the immediate unity of the species and individuality*, of the universal and the particular being. *God is the concept of species as individual, as the sum of all perfections…* it is at the same time in its turn an *individual* being… Christians are thus distinguished from pagans since they identify the individual immediately with the species, the individual *for itself* being considered as the realized existence of the species." Furthermore, this is what led the Brethren of the Free Spirit, who pushed farther beyond in the critique of religion, to want to realize this as a purely individual project: becoming God.

Millenarians were concerned with creating the conditions for community by suppressing money, private property and power. But they were not concerned with organizing communication. They did not conceive of social life as species activity and species life as social activity. Humanity was quite simply brought back from heaven to the earth.

Religion exalted the omnipotence of feeling. It's about living in the love of the neighbor and imitating Christ by multiplying the gift that expects no compensation. It was necessary to liquidate egoism by thinking of the other, which led to the suppression of private property

and to the holding of all things in common. Millenarians only had the *intuition* of communication as the essential human activity.

The Melanesians were not scarred by the tragic experience of social separation. Thus, they knew communication as something objective. They conceived of humanity not as a condition, but as a movement, a circulation, a dynamic of exchange. The transition from the feudal world to the mercantile world, which began in the fourteenth century, was realized between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, under the aegis first of the monarchic and then the democratic state. What there was of the rational in religion had disappeared with the repression of millenarianism in Europe — to such an extent that the movement of the millenarian spirit that appeared in Spain in the nineteenth century, Andalusian anarchism, was being formed on the declared hostility to the church and religion. Religion was quite rightly identified with all that society understood as reactionary forces.

Since 1789, the democratic state has effectively taken on a portion of the church's functions. This does not mean that the church cannot still play a political role on a primary level in countries where the state is not democratic, as in Poland and in Latin America,

where it presents itself as the intermediary between the poor and the powerful.

In the Middle Ages, the church defined the world order, furnishing its rationality. Thus, this same church was the first thing to suffer the attacks of the poor. It claimed to be the consciousness of the world. This function was later transferred to the state, starting from the moment society was completely conquered by the market.

Now the real principle of the world acts furtively, without the poor knowing it. The state remains and is there to give this society both practical and theoretical coherence through the police and democratic pseudo-dialogue. From this moment on, the state is considered the place of consciousness in this world.

In the Middle Ages, misery was recognized as the separation of the human being from his essence, and the poor found words that permitted their propaganda. The ruling class of the time claimed that misery was necessary, acknowledging the possibility of its redemption in the *beyond*. They particularly acknowledged the necessity of keeping redemption in the *beyond*, opposing every attempt to realize such an idea down here. The conflict between the poor and the ruling classes was

thus always posed on the terrain of the idea, in reality.

Later, the lie consisted in declaring that misery was suppressed in the face of the equal participation of everyone in democracy. In 1789, the bourgeoisie took back the terms of primitive christianity, the equality of all in the heavenly city, and transferred into the realms of politics, of the state. With this, they found themselves before a society at a standstill, that had found its end (at least in appearance).

The world of the Middle Ages reached its perfection outside itself, in a rather distant future. The modern world has no other aim than the unlimited development of the commodity to which it is necessary to sacrifice oneself. The christian world recognized an end, a completion, a perfection to achieve: the here and the beyond are brought back together at a given moment. The world of the commodity has no end.

In the Middle Ages, the *beyond* was outside society; it was what society was not. In each moment it could be considered as a social project to carry out. Today, society contains this *beyond* inside itself as spectacle. But the relationship with this *beyond* now means separation, isolation, absence of community. The aspiration to the richness of communication

is entirely immediate and unarmed. It passes through the sole mediation of money. It doesn't have many words. The state has confiscated the thought that was the basis of the christian community and has taken the place of the church as mediator between each isolated individual and the principle of the world.

The lost community then finds itself reestablished around power (the Nation, the Republic) as an imaginary and effective reality. One might notice how this religious relationship with power recaptures the one that existed between the miracle-working kings and Emperor Frederic in the Middle Ages. Behavior toward the institutions of the democratic state follows the same logic as that of the populations of the Middle Ages toward their sovereign, except that it is no longer about a mythical person, but an abstract identity. Let's remember as well that the radical currents of millenarianism rightly carried out a rupture with this messianic hope crystallized around power. They overcame every religious relationship with power — particularly Thomas Münzer.

Since 1789, the aspirations of the poor were to be progressively circumscribed within a political sphere. The defeat of the Levelers in 1649 in England was a kind of preliminary

replay. Then the era of revolutions contaminated by the political spirit began. On the other hand, with regard to the religious relationships with power, it could be noted that those most determined to suppress the state, the Spanish anarchists, stopped in the end before the sacred institution of the Republic, their own leaders having been overcome by the political spirit, just like the English rebels who were stopped in 1381 by the sacred person of the king.

Millenarians opposed the very principle of bourgeois society, the reign of private interest. They blamed money because they considered it contrary to every human relationship, to every form of community. In the course of the centuries that followed the repression of these revolts (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), the bourgeoisie broadened their seizure of the world and confirmed it by taking possession of the state. Its force was that it claimed to realize the christian ideal, certainly not in society as the millenarians would have desired, but in the state. From that time on, this state sphere would constitute the beyond of real society, in which hostility and competition would apparently be overcome in democratic debate — and from which the oppressed should expect relief. But the political spirit that animated this debate was the opposite of community. Each

one asserted her own particular interests, and from this debate a general and abstract interest emanated. "Nothing but the justice of God" called for by medieval rebels became "Nothing but the justice of the state." " All equal before God" thus become "All equal before the state."

There is nothing beyond the world; in practice, this is the message that the modern state palms off on us every day, in which God is no longer of use. When religion contained the principle of the world, the poor could catch hold of the principle, diverting it. Nowadays it remains in secret. The only language is that of the state, which employs it to hide the concrete categories of the world, money and the commodity. Millenarians attacked these categories, meaning the active principle of the world. Contrarily, after their repression, political thought was able to divert the aspirations of the poor from social reality for three centuries.

The first example comes from England in the year 1640. While the Levelers and the New Model Army possessed the means for imposing themselves, they transferred their aspirations to the sphere of political power in the name of the ideal Republic. Thus, they acted on the basis of an abstraction and were defeated. When they consequently tried to undertake a social activity, with the communes of Bêcheux and the

agitation of the Diggers, it was already much too late.

With the formation of the democratic state, for the first time thought has been totally disconnected from all practical truth, from all human experience. The old millenarian slogans have been made into pure abstractions, empty words that no longer have any practical meaning. To think that in the end the demands of millenarianism — freedom, equality, fraternity — were exiled into the sphere of rights where they coexist with their opposite, the principle of private property! Millenarians fought against this principle in the name of the idea of community, and see how now their watchwords serve to uphold the private interests of the bourgeoisie. A fine example of the sleight of hand designed to neutralize dangerous ideas. Furthermore, one can see how the revolutions of the nineteenth century — particularly the Commune — regarded the respect for private property.

The entire history of social struggles of the nineteenth century definitively led to the adherence of the poor to the principles of bourgeois civil society and to the state that defends them. The millenarian spirit only broke loose in countries where the logic of the modern world was not yet completely imposed. Reactionaries

and the forces of the modern state simultaneously fought against these assaults. Both the Francoist reaction and the stalinist counterrevolution fought against the Spanish anarchists. They had everyone against them: the fascist states of Italy and Germany, stalinist Russia, the British bourgeoisie and the Popular Front in France. In the same way, in order to get the better of the Makhnovists, nothing less was required than the successive efforts of the white and red armies.

The year 1968 showed the return of revolts with the millenarian spirit. For the first time after so many years, it was no longer a question of taking political power, but of transforming life. The poor ignored the authority of the state. The events of the year 1968 again posed the question of communication as a social question, but only knew how to do it negatively. The year 1968 was the return of the idea, but that is all. The idea still couldn't be brought into reality as a social project. This is why the state and its defenders had the last word, for the moment.

Colophon

The main text of *Millenarian Rebels* was set in Adobe Caslon; everything else was set in Clarendon. The book was printed on a Chief 117 one-color offset press at Eberhardt Press. Letterpress and finishing work was done on a Chandler & Price 10 x 15 platen press that was built in 1909. Bindery work done on a Bind-O-Mat 200 (affectionately known as "Old Smokey"). Editorial meetings provided with fresh organic eggs by Henrietta, Buffy, Hildegard, Big Red, and Ready Red.

Rest in peace Mojo.